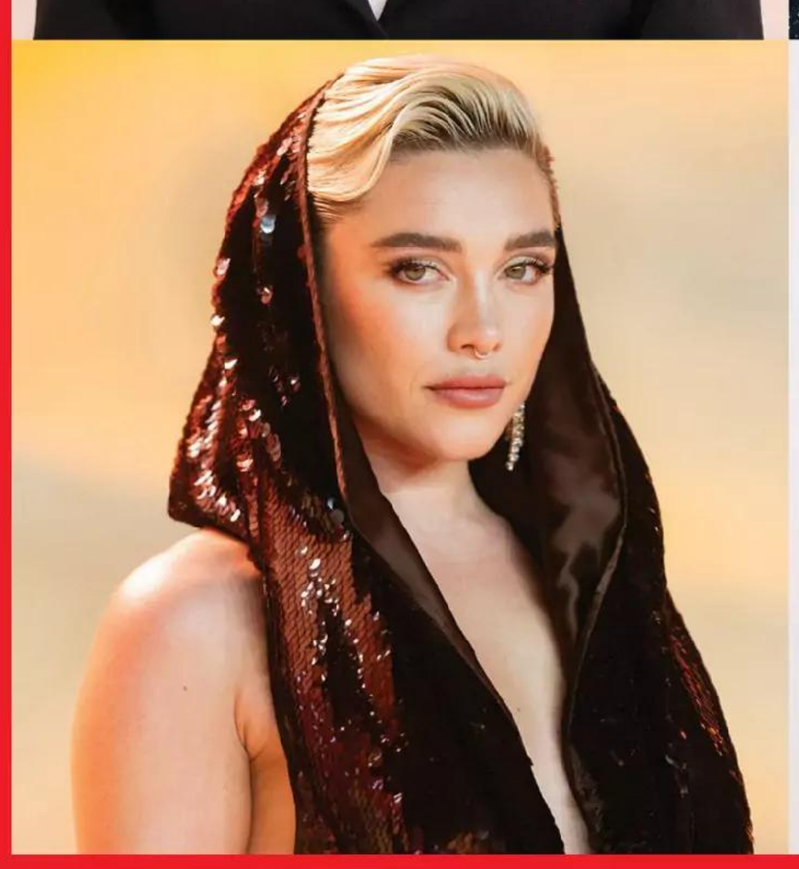
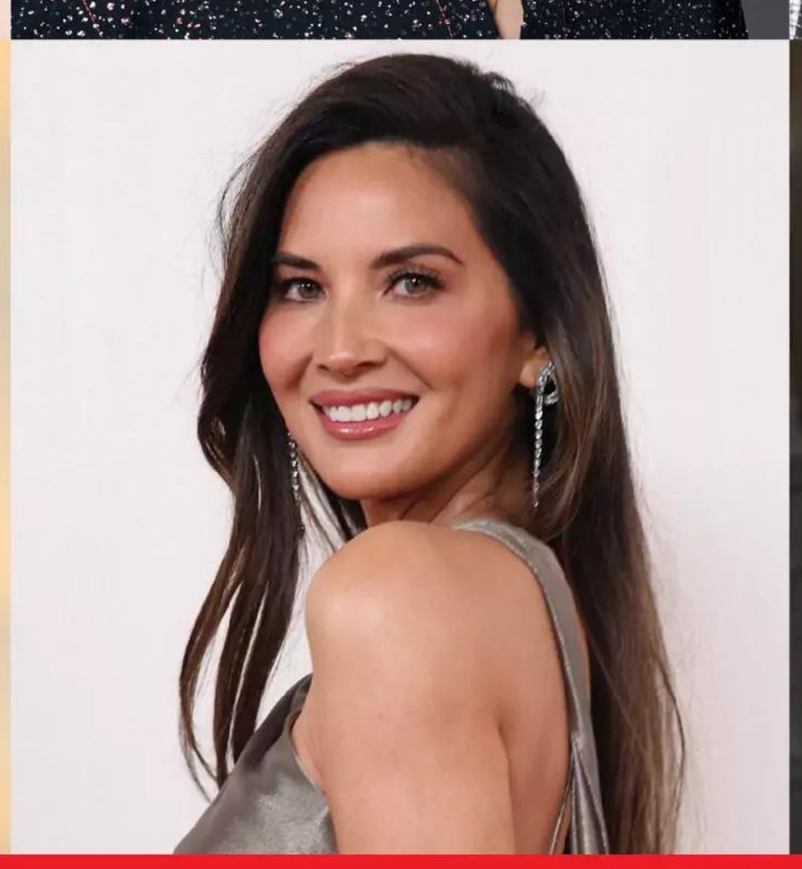
SPECIAL EDITION

TIME

Inspiring Women

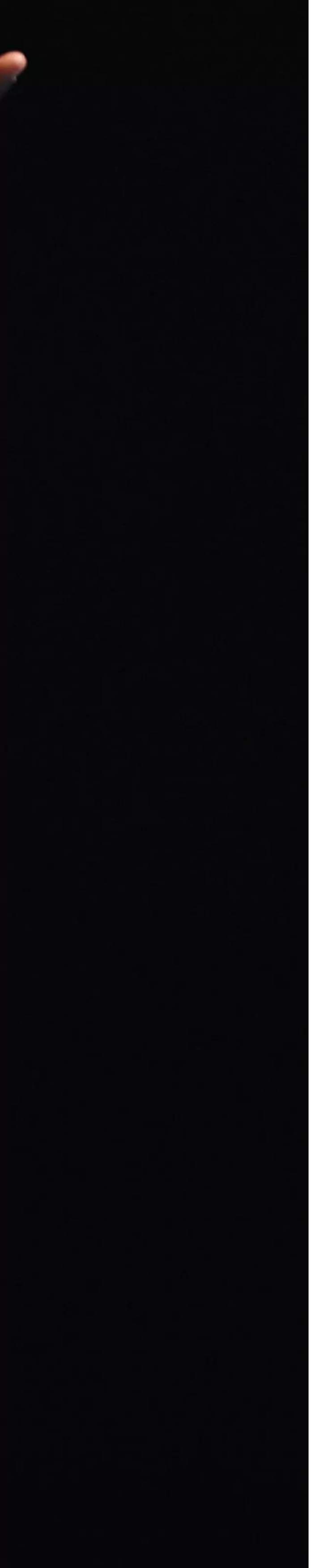
Changemakers for a Better World





“You live through my mistakes. You live through my ups, you live through my downs. … And it’s also a tale of never letting anyone write your story. A lot of people can relate to that. Always be authentically you. Own who you are. And love you. It’s a big tale of self-love.”

SERENA WILLIAMS



TIME

Creating a Better Future for All

In 2019, the number of college-educated women in the U.S. workforce surpassed that of men for the first time. In spring 2023, an analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data by the Pew Research Center showed that in opposite-sex marriages, the percentage of women who earn as much or more than their husbands has tripled in the past 50 years—both partners are equal contributors in roughly 29% of marriages today, up from 11% in 1972. But in the past 20 years, the gender pay gap in the U.S. has remained relatively flat—in 2002, women earned 80 cents for every dollar men earned; in 2022, it was 82 cents. And fighting for equal pay is just one of the challenges women face. Every day, women around the globe are victims of gender-based violence, sexual harassment, workplace discrimination…the list goes on. But every day, there are women, sometimes victims themselves, who break boundaries to drive progress and inspire other women to do the same.

In this issue, we chose to highlight women who are using their influence to fight for a better world, whether it's leading by example or directly impacting policies that benefit other women and society as a whole. These leaders, innovators, scientists, artists, and athletes are catalysts for a more equitable future.

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COCO GAUFF

Chasing the Championship High

BY SEAN GREGORY

COCO GAUFF WILL NEVER FORGET THE UTTER elation she felt in September 2023 when her backhand winner flew by Aryna Sabalenka at the U.S. Open final to give her, at 19 years old, her first Grand Slam championship. "It was like a drug," Gauff says. "I've never felt anything like that." And this is coming from a person who has bungee jumped off Sky Tower, New Zealand's tallest building—twice.

Gauff wants to feel that championship high again. "That's the motivation that drives me," she says. "I'm sure the 'Face of Tennis' and glitz and glam will come along with that. But I don't really care about any of that. I really just care about how many of those major trophies I can get in my house."

The phenom fell just short in January 2024, when she lost in the semis of the Australian Open. But Gauff's triumphs have already fulfilled the promise she first showed at 15 in 2019, when she advanced to the fourth round of Wimbledon. Some pundits expected more majors from her sooner, but Gauff progressed at her own pace. And now, according to Sportico, she's the world's highest-paid female athlete. The more than $22 million Gauff earned in 2023, mostly from endorsements, is a point of pride.

"Being a Black woman, in a sport that isn't as diverse as others are, it definitely means a lot to me," she says.

Having an activist in the family—Gauff's grandmother was the first Black student at her Delray Beach, Florida, high school in 1961—has shaped her perspective. In the days following the murder of George Floyd in 2020, Gauff posted about the injustice on social media and spoke at a protest. "It was to the point where I was crying about it, because I felt like I had to say something," she says. She addressed the crowd in Delray Beach: "If you are choosing silence, you're choosing the side of the oppressor."

Gauff, who turned 20 in March 2024, told TIME, "It's crazy to think that I'm not going to be a teenager anymore. So much of my career, people have called me the teenaged this, teenaged that." But she knows she's still early in her journey. "At first, I was scared to grow up," she admits. "But now I'm embracing adulthood. There's always going to be change needed in this world. I hope I can play a small part."

Gauff reacts after returning a shot against Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus at the 2023 U.S. Open.

DREW AFUALO

Calling Out Misogynists

BY MOISES MENDEZ II

AS LONG AS MEN ARE TERRIBLE ONLINE, DREW Afualo will have work. "It's like the most aggressive form of job security," she tells TIME. "I'll never run out of content." The content creator has amassed 8 million followers on TikTok by giving misogynistic men a taste of their own medicine. The way it usually works: A guy with an alpha-male demeanor uploads a video degrading women, Afualo's followers alert her to its presence, and she posts a video in response.

Her clapback usually puts their own tactics to work against them. If they can make hurtful comments about women's appearances, her philosophy goes, she can silence them by showing them how it feels. "Ask any firefighter: You fight fire with fire," she says. "They burn everything in front of it so the fire has nowhere to go."

The internet has never been a safe place for women. According to the Pew Research Center, 33% of women under 35 say they have been sexually harassed online. While some might find Afualo's tactics less than diplomatic, her cleverly constructed roasts have helped deflate the egos of many a misogynistic troll—and you have to be a gifted comedian, in concept and delivery, to come up with the comebacks she does. Afualo asks that those who find her content off-putting interrogate their own internalized misogyny and, for many women, tendency to seek validation from men.

"It's so common for men to be terrible online and suffer no consequence because it's easy to be anonymous," she says. "I like to think of myself as a tangible consequence."

Consuming such a large amount of "rancid material," as she puts it, could take a toll on one's mental health. But Afualo sees the fruits of her labor in the comments section—both literally and in her Spotify exclusive podcast, aptly named *The Comment Section with Drew Afualo*, where she interviews guests like Kim Petras and Bob the Drag Queen—and in messages from supporters. They tell her she's given them the strength to confront the men who treat them poorly or to break up with abusive partners. "It does get very heavy to deal with all the hate I receive—which is a lot," Afualo says. But knowing she's inspired her followers to stand up for themselves, she says, "helps remind me why I do what I do."

Aufalo also hosts the *Two Idiot Girls* podcast with her sister, where their conversations cover a variety of topics from social issues to mental health. Her book, *Loud: Accept Nothing Less Than the Life You Deserve* was released in July 2024.

Afualo poses for photographers at the 2024 People's Choice Awards in Santa Monica, California.

TARAJI P. HENSON

Knowing Her Worth

BY ANDREW R. CHOW

TARAJI P. HENSON OFTEN PLAYS TOWERING characters who catapult off the screen with charisma, defiance, and tenacity. She ruled network television for six years as Cookie Lyon in *Empire* and stole scenes from Brad Pitt in *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*. She lights up her latest film, a musical adaptation of *The Color Purple*, as the swaggering singer Shug Avery, belting blues anthems in a swampside juke joint as she holds men and women alike in the palm of her hand.

But Henson brings a lot more than sheer bluster to these roles. "The way I see it, people who have these big personas, that's a defense mechanism covering their most prized possession: their heart," she says. "They're like, 'See this hand, so you don't see what's really going on.' "

Lately, Henson, one of Hollywood's most electric personalities and prolific stars, has been pulling back the curtain, sharing her frustration and heartbreak as a Black woman in the industry. In December 2023, she broke down in tears during an interview with Gayle King over her struggle to be paid fairly. Her words sparked an outpouring of affirmation and a larger dialogue about the pervasive pay gap, both in and outside of Hollywood. A 2019 study found that female stars generally earned $1.1 million less than male stars with similar experience. A 2023 Pew study found that nationwide, Black women earned 70% as much as white men.

Despite years of success and accolades, Henson says she still receives lowball offers at every turn—and this for a woman who has breached the upper echelon of Hollywood, who has received nominations for an Oscar and four Emmys over nearly three decades onscreen. Her uphill battle for fair pay and equal treatment has left her wondering if she should quit. She has started entrepreneurial endeavors—a production company and a hair-care brand—in the hopes that one of her ventures will allow her to escape the grind of always searching for the next gig. "I'm getting tired," she says. "And then the disrespect: If there's a playground no one wants you to play on, are you going to keep showing up and hurting yourself?"

The first film adaptation of *The Color Purple*, Alice Walker's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, arrived in 1985. Henson was 15, and was bowled over by the movie's ambition and nuanced centering of Black interiority. "That's when I really started getting serious about acting," she recalls. "I was like, 'Oh wow, I could really be a movie star.' "

She was especially intrigued by the relationship between the meek Celie and the flashy, self-possessed Shug Avery, who teaches Celie to love herself. But Shug, too, has her own insecurities. "She's pouring out her heart and soul," Henson says. "But who really sees her?"

It would be years before Henson would be ready to take on such a mammoth role as Shug. As a young mother, she cycled through jobs, including as a receptionist and a singing waiter on a cruise ship. Her breakout came in 2005, with *Hustle & Flow*, and she has worked steadily ever since. Yet Henson describes even her biggest successes as tinged with humiliation and anxiety. For *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*, Henson says she was offered a mere $75,000 salary compared with the millions earned by her co-star Pitt. During the filming of 2016's *Hidden Figures*, in which she played the indefatigable NASA mathematician Katherine Johnson, she was navigating personal problems, she says, which imbued her scenes in which she faced racism and sexism with an added level of pathos. "My life does that a lot—sometimes the characters bleed over," she says. "So I have to be conscious of making sure I'm not losing myself."

Henson knows that many of the issues she faces extend to her whole community. "We have seven generations of trauma living in our bodies from slavery that we haven't unpacked," she says. In 2019, she testified to Congress about the mental-health crisis for Black Americans. She hopes to eventually open a culturally competent rehab center in Maryland, on a property she says dates back to when an ancestor received their postslavery "40 acres and a mule."

And she hopes that speaking openly about inequities in her industry will encourage others to do the same. "If we stay talking in small little circles, that's not going to change anything," she says. "But we do have allies out there, which I've found out by telling my truth."

Henson is set on holding the door open for those who endeavor to follow in her footsteps, despite the challenges she has faced. She summons the strengths of her characters in service of that goal. "I'm in a movie about women who don't have a voice and are trying to find it," she says, referring to *The Color Purple*. "So who's going to stand up for them?"

Henson at the Acne Studios Ready to Wear Spring/ Summer 2024 fashion show in Paris in September 2023.

AURORA JAMES

Changing What You Buy

BY CADY LANG

Left: James attending the 2023 Fifteen Percent Pledge Gala in New York City. Above: Speaking at the 58th Annual Frederick Douglass Awards in New York City in June 2024.

WHEN AURORA JAMES FOUNDED HER NONPROFIT Fifteen Percent Pledge in 2020, in the wake of the reckoning sparked by the murder of George Floyd, she knew that the push for racial justice needed to include addressing the Black-white wealth gap. As black squares flooded social media feeds and corporations vowed to do better when it came to diversity, James saw an opportunity for companies to take real action to back up their pledges. On her Instagram account, she issued a challenge to major retailers, asking them to commit to buying 15% of their products from Black-owned businesses.

"We represent 15% of the [U.S.] population and we need to represent 15% of your shelf space," she wrote in her post, which went viral, leading to the formal creation of the organization.

This push for financial equality and economic opportunity was informed by James' own experiences as a small-business owner; as the creator of Brother Vellies, a luxury shoes and accessories brand that she founded in 2013 to sustainably showcase the handicraft of artisans around the world, she knew all too well that connections and access to capital—and not necessarily skills, ideas, or hard work—could determine the success of a brand. Though Brother Vellies was popular and critically acclaimed (it won a coveted CFDA award in 2015), the brand still suffered from financial strain for a period because of a troublesome business loan James took out due to the limited funds. It's a scenario she hopes can be eliminated for other entrepreneurs with education, resources, and initiatives like the Fifteen Percent Pledge.

"I was acutely aware of the fact that talent is distributed equally but opportunity and access is not," says James. "When you don't have 'friends and family' to raise money from and you're in industries that require a lot of capital to scale, you have unique challenges, especially when you haven't had the opportunity culturally to accrue generational wealth in this country."

In the years since the Fifteen Percent Pledge was created, over 28 companies worldwide have taken the pledge, including retailers like Sephora and Nordstrom, putting more than 600 Black-owned brands on shelves and redirecting $14 billion in revenue to Black-owned businesses in the process, she says. And the organization has big plans for the future—their goal is that by 2030, Black entrepreneurs will be responsible for $1.4 trillion of wealth generation, increasing Black business representation by 14.6%. Last year, James also launched the Friends and Family Collective, an $850 million venture capital fund in partnership with private-equity firm VMG Partners, as part of an effort to support Black entrepreneurs (as of 2022, just 1% of VC went to Black founders.)

"I personally love investing in Black-owned brands and always have, but it isn't just a nice thing that I'm doing," she said. "I think it's also a really smart investment."

MEGAN RAPINOE

Advocating for the Transgender Community

BY MAHITA GAJANAN

WHEN MEGAN RAPINOE, TWO-TIME WORLD CUP winner with the U.S. women's national soccer team and outspoken advocate for equal pay and LGBTQ rights, spoke at TIME's second annual Women of the Year gala in in Los Angeles in March 2023, she dedicated her place on the list to the transgender community.

"I am only here because of them," Rapinoe told the room, which included other honorees and notable guests. "We all know what's going on in our country with the attempted erasure of trans people."

Transgender rights in the U.S. are in a precarious place, with legislation proposed in many states that would roll back care and freedoms for transgender people. As of July 2024, over 500 anti-LGBTQ bills have been introduced at the state level throughout the country. In January 2023, for example, Utah passed the first law banning gender-affirming healthcare for transgender youth, effectively erasing the opportunity for young people to seek out hormone therapy and change their names and genders on their birth certificates.

Speaking out against the spate of anti-transgender legislation and increasing anti-transgender sentiment, Rapinoe urged people to look at what transgender people have created for the world: "a way to live a whole life and to be a whole person, whatever that may mean to you."

Rapinoe pointed out the perspective she's gained from the transgender people in her own life. "The way they refuse to live their life any other way than completely whole is so inspiring. I'm inspired by the invitation to be completely myself. They offer us a full view of what it means to be a human in the world," she said. "A whole opportunity to be the crazy ass human beings that we are. That's a great gift."

Rapinoe acknowledged the challenges and pressures—"to shrink, to soften, to disappear"—that women have historically faced. "We're required to hold so much all of the time. Either carry the world on your back or you'll be left behind," she said.

But she also lamented that women seeking more for themselves haven't always been inclusive: "White women have left Black women—and everyone else—behind. Straight women leave queer women behind."

"Let's not be those kinds of people," Rapinoe concluded. "Being a woman: Make it expansive. Don't ever leave anybody behind. … Let's bring everyone in and figure the rest out from there."

Rapinoe poses at a photo shoot for The Best FIFA Football Awards 2019, where she was named The Best Women's FIFA Player.

LEENA NAIR

Putting Women in Charge

BY ALANA SEMUELS

FOR ALL THE TALK OF PROMOTING AND VALUING women in businesses, there's been depressingly little progress in boardrooms and C-suites in the past few years. One notable exception is Leena Nair, who became global CEO of Chanel in January 2022. An outsider to the fashion world, Nair is hoping to pioneer a different kind of leadership—one that celebrates compassion, empathy, and kindness.

"It's a great time to show that the days of the superhero leader are behind us," says Nair, who grew up in rural India and now lives in London. "I have always believed in the collective voice, in diverse perspectives; if I sit in a meeting, I want to listen to every voice around the table, not just the dominant ones."

It may be a surprising approach from the CEO of a luxury brand known for purses that sell for thousands of dollars, but Nair, 55, has proved throughout her career that she can succeed while still doing good for employees—and the world. She spent 30 years at consumer packaged-goods giant Unilever, nearly six of them as the head of human resources, where she increased the share of female managers from 38% to 50% and helped the company become known for its socially conscious initiatives. ("You have to make it a business priority like any other, which means you have to set targets and hold people accountable," she says, about how she achieved gender parity at Unilever.)

More than 60% of management positions at Chanel are held by women, which she argues positions the company to show the rest of the world what business can look like when women are in charge. "We're putting people relations in the heart of everything we do, which can sometimes get crowded out in the AI world," she says.

Putting people first doesn't mean just Chanel employees; Nair increased the amount of funding for Fondation Chanel, the company's charitable arm, to $100 million from $20 million when she took the CEO role. It's now one of the largest philanthropic organizations in the world working for the empowerment of women and girls. The nonprofit partners with local organizations in 57 countries, working on projects like supporting unmarried women in Korea, helping women plant mangrove trees in India, and bolstering affordable care in the U.S. "We really believe that when women thrive, the world thrives," she says.

Though few of Nair's female relatives had pursued careers or higher education, she was determined to go to university to study technology and engineering. And she's grown used to breaking barriers: In the 1990s, as a young executive, she was the only woman working at a Unilever factory in Chennai, India—such a rarity that buses would stop at the gate of the estate so that workers could see her. "I was once upon a time somebody dreaming to have resources and opportunities and the ability to have a voice in the world," she says. "It's so gratifying to be able to work with a team to do that for millions of women."

Far Left: *Nair after a Bloomberg Television interview in April 2024.* ***Left:*** *Nair (right) and entrenpreneur Imran Amed speak at the BoF Voices global livestream in 2023.*

ISSA RAE

Revealing Hollywood's Unkept Promises

BY ANDREW R. CHOW

***Left:** Rae attends the 2022 Tribeca Film Festival after-party for* Vengeance. ***Above:** Rae attending the world premiere of the 2023 film* Renaissance: A Film by Beyoncé *in Beverly Hills, California.*

ISSA RAE'S OFFICE IN SOUTH LOS ANGELES overflows with trinkets from her many successes. Awards perch on virtually every surface. Three boxes of President Barbie dolls, her character from 2023's biggest blockbuster, sit high on a shelf. There are purple roses, bottles of LeBron James' Lobos 1707 tequila—a company Rae invests in—and custom pillows from *Insecure*, her hit HBO series that ran for five zeitgeist-capturing seasons.

But in February 2024, the item that Rae was most excited about was her brand-new Moleskine notebook. Rae buys a new notebook every year and fills it with personal reflections, creative ideas, and tasks to complete for her many businesses. The previous fall, her 2023 journal started getting so full, she wrote in smaller and smaller fonts to preserve space.

"I love Mondays, and the first of the year is like a super Monday for me," she says. "To be able to open a new journal was very exciting in the nerdiest way possible."

Rae, 39, is especially determined to turn the page because 2023 was "not fun at all," she admits. In public, she was absolutely crushing it: She won a Peabody Trailblazer award, stole scenes in two of the year's most hyped films, *Barbie* and *American Fiction*, and released the second season of her critically acclaimed Max show *Rap Sh!t*.

But as the tagline for season 3 of *Insecure* read, "glowing up ain't easy." And in her quest to become a media mogul on the level of Oprah or Debbie Allen, Rae has faced growing pains: She had to lay off eight employees during the WGA and SAG-AFTRA strikes; navigate a labyrinth of California business laws; and watch as her projects got sidelined or canceled. Perhaps worst of all, Rae says she witnessed Hollywood backsliding on pledges to increase representation and diversity. "I've never seen Hollywood this scared and clueless, and at the mercy of Wall Street," she says.

In the face of these roadblocks, Rae hatched a slew of plans for a better 2024. She's working on developing at least two new projects for HBO, including, she told TIME exclusively, a project set in an "alternative present," which will be the first show since *Insecure* that she will create, write, and star in; and a comedy set in corporate America, created in partnership with Diallo Riddle and Bashir Salahuddin, the creators of the shows *South Side* and *Sherman's Showcase*. She's also working to build a studio campus in South L.A.

Rae has long made it her priority to create pipelines for people of color, but as she scales upward, she's learning more and more about how to balance her personal entrepreneurial priorities with a larger fight for equity. "I recognize that I have to do well economically to be able to make change," she says. "That's frustrating, that's ugly. But I recognize that money moves things faster—and so much of what I do is with the intention to help make those moves."

Issa Rae's rise is held up as one of the prime DIY success stories of the digital era. In college, Rae began making a YouTube web series, *Dorm Diaries*, with a camcorder borrowed from the Stanford library. She raised money for a subsequent web series, *The Mis-Adventures*

of Awkward Black Girl, on Kickstarter, and praise for the show's humor and relatability spread. A deal with HBO for *Insecure*, her show about Black millennials navigating life and love in L.A., followed.

Rae's ambitions have always stretched beyond TV writing into entrepreneurship. As a child, she wore out her VHS tape of the film *Twins*, and was particularly absorbed by scenes in which Danny DeVito's character stomps around with a briefcase concocting schemes. "It was nefarious, but there was something imprinted in my mind that I wanted that," she says.

These days, Rae's growing portfolio includes a production company (Hoorae), an indie music label (Raedio), a management company (Color Creative), a marketing agency (Fête), a prosecco line (Viarae), a hair-care brand (Sienna Naturals), and a stake in the U.S. SailGP Team. About a mile and a half from her Hoorae offices sits the Inglewood branch of Hilltop Coffee, a coffee shop that Rae co-owns; it's about an eight-minute-drive from the house she grew up in.

Rae is certainly doing well for herself. In 2021, she signed a deal with WarnerMedia reported to be eight figures. But many of her enterprises are specifically geared toward creating opportunities for her community. Rae used *Insecure* as a breeding ground for Black talent, allowing writers, musicians, actors, producers, and others to cut their teeth on a prime-time HBO show. Her other businesses function similarly: She gives proteges titles and helps them grow into those roles. "If she can't do stuff to bring other people with her, she's not going to do it," says Montrel McKay, Hoorae's president for development and production.

Rae's creative, entrepreneurial, and equity-driven goals coalesced with *Rap Sh!t*, her follow-up to *Insecure*. While Hollywood executives always prefer shows led by big names, Rae put her trust in a first-time showrunner (Syreeta Singleton), an early-stage TV director (Sadé Clacken Joseph) to helm the pilot, and two relatively non-famous leads (Aida Osman and KaMillion). She then set her many businesses to work on various aspects of the series. Hoorae developed the show; Raedio handled the music supervision; Fête cut deals for product placement. "That's an ideal model, where we activate every single vertical," she says.

But *Rap Sh!t* didn't receive nearly the amount of online buzz that *Insecure* did—and in January 2024, it was canceled after two seasons by its parent company Warner Bros. Discovery, which, like many other media conglomerates, has been hell-bent on cutting costs. "The model used to be everyone chasing Netflix in buying as much as you can through programming," says McKay. "And then when Netflix had that earnings report in early 2022 and didn't show the same growth, everything kind of ground to a halt. We want to do opportunity creation for people. But we can't do it the same way, because the money's not flowing in the same way."

A historic double strike sent the industry into further disarray. In the end, Rae was grateful for the victories the guilds secured. "But there was the frustration of, 'Oh, my gosh, this project that I've been working on for five years just disappeared,'" she says.

Hoorae is no longer involved with the adaptation of the *New York Times* podcast N*ice White Parents*, or of Brit Bennett's best-selling novel *The Vanishing Half*. Hoorae developed *Tre Cnt*, a wrestling series with Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson, but HBO passed on it, McKay says. WarnerMedia also canceled *Sweet Life: Los Angeles*, a reality TV show Rae produced, after two seasons.

Rae believes there's no way *Rap Sh!t*, with its culturally specific lens, local bent, and unabashed raunchiness, would have been greenlit by WarnerMedia today, as all executives seem to want, she says, is safe, "universal" stories. Its cancellation is just one example of what Rae sees as a larger withering of promises Hollywood executives made in 2020 toward increasing diversity and representation, both on- and off-screen. "There is a bitterness of just like, who suffers from you guys pulling back? People of color always do," she says.

A UCLA diversity report found that in 2022, racial, ethnic, and gender diversity among movie actors, directors, and writers for theatrical releases slid back to 2019 levels after trending upwards for the three years. People of color accounted for only 22% of lead actors, 17% of directors, and 12% of writers. A report from USC Annenberg's Inclusion Initiative in January 2024 called the entertainment industry's previous pledges to support inclusion "performative."

Rae does not mince words when it comes to the current leaders of Hollywood. "I'm sorry, but there aren't a lot of smart executives anymore," she says. "And a lot of them have aged out and are holding on to their positions and refusing to let young blood get in."

In prior eras, Rae says, the money-making suits mostly stayed away from creative choices. "Now these conglomerate leaders are also making the decisions about Hollywood. Y'all aren't creative people. Stick to the money," she says. "The people that are taking chances are on platforms like TikTok: That's what's getting the eyeballs of the youth. So you're killing your own industry."

In an email to TIME, HBO executives signaled their ongoing support of Rae. "We've established a creative shorthand over the years and with every new project, we pick up right where we left off. There's a flow to it that inspires me," wrote Amy Gravitt, executive vice president for HBO Programming. "We look forward to what genres Issa and Hoorae will take on next," added Casey Bloys, chairman and CEO of HBO and Max Content.

Rae says she feels "secure" in her relationship with HBO. Nevertheless, she says industry changes have forced her to reevaluate the feasibility of "smaller, quieter projects." "When you have all of these streaming services that are competing with each other, it means they're also moving the goalposts of what success looks like and what their brand is. It's all mush," she says. "I know what my brand identity is and what I want to make. But if that doesn't align with who's paying me to make stuff, then that's complex. We are malleable, but only to an extent."

In the 2023 movie *American Fiction*—which received five Oscar nominations and won Best Adapted Screenplay—Rae plays Sintara Golden, a commercially successful author who the film's protagonist, Monk, believes to be a hack pandering to white audiences.

Below: *Rae poses for photographers at the European premiere of* Barbie *in London in 2023.* ***Below right:*** *Presenting alongside Ramy Youssef at the 2024 Academy Awards.*

In a confrontation between them, Golden tells Monk she's simply being pragmatic about her creative and professional choices: "I'm OK with giving the market what it wants," she says.

Rae's own attitude is more nuanced. She understands the reach that movies like *Barbie* and *Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse* have, and the impact that she herself can have by appearing in them. On the Golden Globes red carpet, a moment in which two young Black girls excitedly recognized her as President Barbie went viral. "It took me a while to understand that when they see me, they see this version of Barbie that they aspire to be," Rae says. When I met her a few days later, she was still wearing the friendship bracelet they gave her.

But Rae has no aspirations of helming her own blockbuster franchise. "I'm just excited to create and see what I can do in this space where everything is asking for those big, IP-driven things," she says. And while she's operating in a tough environment, she's used to navigating around rejection and discouragement. When she was pitching early in her career, executives told her there wouldn't be an audience for a show about awkward Black women. One even advised her against centering a character with darker skin. "I know what drives me and I know what brought me in—and I remember when they were telling me that they didn't want to make my types of stories," she says. "So I'm still optimistic in that way."

As Rae fights for representation on a national level, she is pouring resources into the betterment of her own neighborhood. She has invested heavily in the development of South L.A., which has been harmed by

discriminatory policies like redlining and underfunding. When Rae featured local businesses on *Insecure*, they saw a jump in customers, which was soon known as "The Issa Effect." In 2019, Rae chose to house Hoorae's office just outside of Inglewood. A sparkling depiction of Nipsey Hussle, the rapper who was a local hero and was killed that year, hangs downstairs as a constant reminder of the company's mission to uplift the surrounding community.

Rae hopes to compound those efforts by building an entire campus for both local filmmakers and major studios. While South L.A. is a cultural mecca—think gangsta rap, the Black Arts Movement, *Boyz n the Hood*, *Love & Basketball*—it lacks film and TV infrastructure. Rae believes a production studio could serve as an economic engine for the neighborhood, providing union jobs while also sparking the interest of tourists. At the same time, Rae is all too cognizant of her role in the neighborhood's gentrification, and is working through how to improve the lives of people in the neighborhood without displacing its residents.

Malick Diop, Hoorae's chief financial officer (and Rae's older brother), says an early bid for a piece of city-owned land for the studio was unsuccessful. But Rae is adamant that an acquisition will happen soon. "We have the investors; it's just about locking in on that land," Rae says. "When I tell you we're ready, we're ready." She's come this far—in developing the studio, but also in building her empire—and she's not about to back down now.

"I have my little stake in this limited plot of land, and I'm gonna make sure that I bring in as many people to live on it as possible," she says. "So until we run out of opportunities, they'll be good."

Rae at the 2016 premiere of Insecure *in Los Angeles.*

CLAUDIA GOLDIN

Telling Women's Stories

BY CHARLOTTE ALTER

ON OCTOBER 9, 2023, THE ECONOMIST CLAUDIA Goldin was doing what most people do at 4:30 in the morning: sleeping. But then the phone rang, and her life changed. That day, she became only the third woman ever to win the Nobel Prize in economics—and the first woman to win it on her own. She also happens to be the first woman ever to become a tenured professor of economics at Harvard University.

Goldin, 78, has dedicated herself to studying women and work. Over the course of her career that spans half a century, she has published foundational research on the ways women balance career and family, the persistence of the gender wage gap, and the influence of the birth control pill on women's life decisions. All of this has made her the world's premier expert on how the workforce has changed women's life cycles and how women's participation has changed the workforce.

Goldin's work started with an observation on who was being left out of the conversation about families and labor: "We would talk about the children and the male head of the household. We would talk about single women who were working, or widowed, or those that were separated," she says. "But we hardly talked about the married woman—the wife, the mother—and I realized that her story was unfolding through the 20th century, and it was a story that someone should tell in a manner that was big and bold and that dug deep into the history."

For all of her achievements in economics, Goldin confesses that when she was growing up in the Bronx in the 1950s and '60s, she didn't picture herself in the field—in fact, she says, "I don't think I knew what an economist was." It was science that drew her in—specifically the experience of observing bacteria through a microscope in high school. But, once she arrived at Cornell University, Goldin did what she now encourages her undergraduate students to do: Experiment, try new things, see what resonates.

"I don't give advice," she says, "but the one thing I do tell my students—because most of my students have spent an enormous amount of time, since they were little kids, thinking about their future—is that that's a way of hemming yourself in."

Goldin gives a press conference at the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences in Stockholm, Sweden, in 2023.

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ADRIANA BARBOSA

Supporting Afro-Brazilian Entrepreneurs

BY SANYA MANSOOR

WHEN ADRIANA BARBOSA WAS A CHILD AND HER family was struggling to pay rent, she would sell food that her grandmother cooked to raise money. They were some of the few Afro-Brazilians in a middle-class neighborhood in São Paulo, Brazil, and she quickly learned that, although more than half of Brazilians have African ancestry, many of the Brazilians profiting off Black ideas do not.

This is significant considering how stark Brazil's racial wealth gap is, even as officials have downplayed the existence of racism in their society. The average income for white workers was 74% higher than that of Black and brown workers in 2019, according to a study by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics. Afro-Brazilian men with the same level of education as their white male colleagues made only 70% of the income.

In her 20s, Barbosa, who was always excited by everything from Spike Lee's films to the Black Panthers' activism, created the Feira Preta Festival, both to help pay the bills and to celebrate Black culture. The first event showcased music, plays, and literature—and drew more than 5,000 visitors. It also provided a venue for Barbosa and other entrepreneurs to sell their products.

Barbosa was sharply aware of the lack of interest from the private sector in Black-led initiatives and wanted to change that. She therefore grew the Feira Preta Festival into a larger initiative, the PretaHub platform, which is focused on building a more equitable market for Afro Diaspora entrepreneurs. Funded by donations from Brazilian private businesses, international-development agencies, and Brazilian public-financing programs, PretaHub has invested more than $11 million Brazilian reals ($2.2 million) into assisting entrepreneurs so far, helping them scale up and digitize their operations.

Which isn't to say it hasn't had challenges. Funding has been an issue. A white neighborhood blocked the festival from taking place on its streets, she says. Some ticket revenue was stolen. But Barbosa has been determined to keep it all going; the festival has drawn more than 200,000 visitors over the years and has turned into one of the largest Black culture events in Latin America.

Over the last two decades, PretaHub has also worked with more than 10,000 Black entrepreneurs in fields like architecture, fashion, gastronomy, tourism, gaming, and technology. More than two-thirds are women, roughly half of whom haven't attended university. And while the focus remains on Brazil, the organization has also worked with entrepreneurs across Africa and South America, including South Africa, Burkina Faso, Colombia, and Bolivia.

"It began with a small action to pay rent," says Barbosa. "Today it's a big social organization that has created a market for Black people."

Barbosa attends the TIME Impact Dinner: The Closers in New York City in 2024.

REBECCA AJULU-BUSHELL

Giving All Interns a Chance

BY TARA LAW

WHEN REBECCA AJULU-BUSHELL WAS A FINE-ARTS student at Oxford University, she landed an internship at a prestigious gallery. There, she learned about the art world, but not in the way she expected. The organization, which seemed to exclusively employ blond, white women, paid a stipend that didn't even cover her London Tube fare. To get a full-time job there, a colleague warned, "You either have to know someone who knows [the gallery owner]. Or you have to wait until someone dies," Ajulu-Bushell recalls.

The experience was disheartening, but it didn't curb the drive of the first Black woman to swim for Great Britain's national team and former world No. 1 swimmer in the 50-meter breaststroke. Ajulu-Bushell is now CEO of the 10,000 Interns Foundation, which, in three years, has created 5,000 internships for Black or disabled students and graduates at over 700 companies across the U.K. The program requires employers to pay the minimum local living wage and provide meaningful work to its interns, Ajulu-Bushell says, and about 30% of the internships convert into full-time jobs.

An internship "can stay with you forever," she says. "It can create this inertia that pushes you forward, or it can create this force that holds you back and pushes you down. We want to empower people, which is probably the opposite of what I felt afterwards."

Born in the U.K. to a white British mother and a Black father, and raised until she was 13 in Kenya, Ajulu-Bushell was perceived by other people as Black when she was in the U.K. and white in her father's home Kenyan village. Her father, a former freedom fighter in South Africa, raised her with a strong sense of the importance of fighting for social justice. But he also taught her that as a person of color, the only way to get to the top was to work so hard that her talent became "undeniable."

As a teenage swimmer, however, Ajulu-Bushell realized that being exceptional came with a cost. Struggling with the pressure she felt to succeed in a predominately white sport, she quit while training for the 2012 Olympics. She recounts the experience in her memoir, *These Heavy Black Bones*, which was released in the U.K. in June 2024.

Throughout her career, Ajulu-Bushell has seen how easy it can be for Black professionals to burn out as they seek to stand out compared with their white colleagues—or, once they have risen to the top, to conform rather than opening pathways for their Black peers to rise. Now that she has reached a position of power, Ajulu-Bushell wants to help others get ahead while staying true to themselves. Her goal, she says, is for the 10,000 Interns Foundation to shift the face of business in the U.K. and enable participants to see "Black excellence all around them."

***Above:** Ajulu-Bushell competes in the 50-meter breaststroke at the 2010 Commonwealth Games in Delhi, India. **Right:** Attending the Skepta + Big Smoke Corp. dinner in London in 2024.*

IBTIHAJ MUHAMMAD & A'JA WILSON

Investing in Women's Sports

BY SANYA MANSOOR

TWO ICONIC FEMALE ATHLETES—IBTIHAJ Muhammad and A'ja Wilson—called for more U.S. investment in women's sports at the 2024 TIME100 Summit.

"I would love to see these big companies…invest in women and invest in the game," Muhammad said.

Muhammad is an Olympic medalist in fencing, activist, and author and Wilson is an Olympic gold medalist in basketball and WNBA Champion. The pair spoke with Pablo Torre, host of the sports podcast, *Pablo Torre Finds Out*, just days after the lower pay of female athletes was thrust into the spotlight when basketball phenom Caitlin Clark was selected first in the WNBA draft with a salary of $338,056 over the next four years.

Yet some female college athletes are doing significantly better financially than their predecessors after the NCAA lifted its ban on college athletes earning money for use of their names, images, and likenesses. Asked about how different her career would have been if she were still in college right now, Wilson is direct. "Obviously, my bank account would be the biggest difference but I just couldn't wrap my head around the fact that I would have an agent in college," she says.

Wilson also spoke about not compromising on her values and helping young Black girls feel seen when getting the money. "When it comes to big sponsorships… I'm like, well, you're gonna get me and I'm not changing that because that's what needs to be seen," she says.

"Black women have been a force," says Muhammad. "When it comes to the WNBA, this is essentially an organization that was built on the backs of Black women."

The duo praised young athletes while urging them to recognize the need to protect their mental health. "You have to protect your peace first; your brand is gonna come with that but your peace is what really matters," Wilson said.

Wilson also talked about the awkwardness of playing in the Olympics and the WNBA season so close to each other. "I go from you being my rival—absolutely can't stand you—to now it's like—girl, let's go get this gold… it's very hard to do that," she says. "But it also shows how elite the athletes are when you make it to that stage."

Muhammad recalled fielding many questions on politics, instead of on sports, before participating at the Olympics. She wishes Team USA prepared her better for that moment. "It was very stressful because you want to do well and you want to compete well for your country but at the same time, I wanted to represent the communities I'm a part of to the best of my ability." Muhammad says she looks to boxer Muhammad Ali for inspiration when it comes to her values. "Muhammad Ali has always been at the epicenter of the way that I view my platform," she said.

Wilson also called on fans to show appreciation for female athletes: "Buy that jersey. Go to that game, take someone else, put your money where your mouth is and invest in these women," she said. Muhammad agrees. She's a longtime fan who grew up watching women's basketball; her parents would take her to see the New York Liberty play at Madison Square Garden. (She's from New Jersey.) "I've been invested from the time I was young," she says.

Muhammad (left) and Wilson attend the 2024 TIME100 Gala at Lincoln Center in New York City.

TIME100

AMANDA NGUYEN & KELLEY ROBINSON

Fighting for Civil Rights

BY JULIA ZORTHIAN

***Left:** Nguyen speaks at Rise's "What Were You Wearing?" exhibit at the United Nations in 2022.* ***Above:** Robinson addresses the crowd at the 2024 National Black Justice Coalition Equity March in Washington, D.C.*

FOR CIVIL RIGHTS ACTIVISTS LIKE AMANDA Nguyen and Kelley Robinson, the road to a more equal future can be long and difficult. Two things crucial for getting there, they said in conversation with CNN anchor Abby Philip at the 2024 TIME100 Summit, are joy and math.

"I think joy is the most radical form of rebellion," said Nguyen, who was a key force behind passing the Sexual Assault Survivors' Rights Act in 2016 (and is also an astronaut). "I think in a world where so many people are fighting for the mere act of existence—whatever it is that they are trying to be—to have that joy in what you do and in the end state, that to me is my personal type of activism."

Robinson is the president of an advocacy group for LGBTQ+ people, Human Rights Campaign, and she previously spent 13 years working with the Planned Parenthood Federation of America. She agreed that joy is necessary, and added it takes creativity to build a coalition by meeting other people in places where they find joy.

"The other part of it is math," Robinson said. "How do you get to 50 plus 1. How do you get the majority of people to understand that the position you're on is actually the one that's going to carry our nation forward."

Both also discussed their experiences balancing actionable, short-term goals, like getting a piece of legislation passed, with a greater, expansive vision of what a better future could look like. Robinson said that leaders of activist organizations can sometimes romanticize the big, inspiring goals, but people can burn out that way without smaller wins.

"Think about what it looks like to actually sustain a movement," she said, adding that the Montgomery Bus Boycott was 381 days long. "We have to talk about the sides of it that aren't actually romantic more often." Nguyen agreed and pointed to her past work with discrete periods of time, such as campaign seasons or legislative sessions.

Robinson pointed to how far the U.S. has come in her lifetime, noting that Joe Biden, a person who once voted to limit marriage rights with the Defense of Marriage Act as Senator, later signed the Respect for Marriage Act as President, codifying same-sex marriage into law.

Amidst the current politically-motivated assault on rights of transgender people and minors, Robinson said she has been traveling the country to speak with trans youth and thinks overcoming the current challenges could be an opening for a better future.

"That gives me hope," she said. "Because there is something that's coming on the other side of the crisis."

ARIANA DEBOSE

Saying “You Belong”

BY SIMMONE SHAH

ARIANA DEBOSE, WHO BECAME THE FIRST openly queer woman of color (she is Black, Puerto Rican, and white) to win an Oscar for her role as Anita in the 2021 film adaptation of the musical *West Side Story*, spoke about the importance of celebrating the LGBTQ community amid political turmoil in a toast at the June 2022 TIME100 Gala in New York City.

"When TIME asked if I would give one of this year's toasts, I knew I had to start by addressing the magnitude of what it means to me to be queer. It is Pride Month after all. And while there is so much turmoil in the world right now, it's more important now than ever that we as a community celebrate what it means to have pride; the struggles, the joys, the beauty of what it means to stand in all that we are, the fullness of our authenticity, but most importantly, our humanity," the TIME100 honoree said.

"I'm so incredibly proud to be part of a community that is resilient, that values empathy, that empowers one another to stand up for who we are," DeBose added. "In a world where 'Don't Say Gay' is quite literally being written into law because of other people's power and influence… or perhaps the loss of those things, I want every single person who identifies as LGBTQ to know that you are loved, you are seen, you are valued, and you do belong."

During her toast, she noted the importance of empowering youth. "Our youth face unimaginable challenges, too many to name, but we all know, see and feel them." she said. "With the power and influence those of us in this room have, it's so important that we not only show up for them and empower them, but that we also protect them… so they have the space to use their voices and live in a world that celebrates and uplifts all that they are and have the potential to achieve."

During the gala's cocktail hour, DeBose told TIME that she's looking forward to finding out what the 2022 group of TIME100 honorees will do with their influence. "I've always looked to past groups to see what they were focused on and what they were doing. And I asked the same question about this group that I get to be a part of: What are we doing?" she said. "There's so much going on in the world. So many things need to be addressed, whether it's keeping our young people safe, fighting for our rights, taking stronger steps towards saving the planet, or just keeping our humanity alive. Maybe that's what we're focused on as a group, our humanity."

"The American Dream used to be synonymous with whiteness. I am America. I am a Black woman, I am Afro-Lat. I'm queer. I literally belong to so many marginalized groups wrapped up in one woman. But that's America. The dream of success has to be able to be wrapped up in these packages. The only way we get those ideas forward is by putting them on screens and telling those stories. But that's just one facet of it," DeBose told TIME in 2021.

***Top left:** DeBose accepts the 2022 Best Supporting Actress Oscar at the Academy Awards in Hollywood, California. **Left:** Backstage at the 2023 Tony Awards.*

GRETA GERWIG

Trusting Her Instincts

BY SAM LANSKY

THE FILMMAKER GRETA GERWIG WAS IN WEST London in early 2024 when she walked past a movie set—not her own, but something that just happened to be filming on the street—and stopped for a moment to watch. A light was positioned in front of the house; a car pulled up and an actor got out, shaking the gates and yelling. There was an intensity to the scene, and a vulnerability to his performance. Then, abruptly, the spell was broken. Someone yelled: "Cut! Going again." A groomer ran out to fix the actor's hair, a mundane but crucial bit of business.

"Movies!" Gerwig says, almost in the manner of an old-timey studio executive, recalling the moment. "Love 'em!" We're having lunch in Soho; she's in London while her husband, the writer-director Noah Baumbach, preps production on his next film, and while she works on a new adaptation of the first book in C.S. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia* series. It's one of the biggest pieces of intellectual property of all time, but that's a fitting thing to tackle after what was, for Gerwig, a remarkable year. Her dazzling, subversive *Barbie*, which she co-wrote and directed, grossed more than $1.4 billion at the box office, making it the biggest movie of the year, and the highest-grossing film ever directed by a woman. *Barbie* has since become a pop-culture phenomenon, from I Am Kenough hoodies to discourse over a third-act monologue delivered by America Ferrera about the impossible pressures women face. Alongside Christopher Nolan's *Oppenheimer*, *Barbie* was credited with keeping the theatrical model afloat in 2023. In 2024, the film received eight Oscar nominations, winning Best Original Song for "What Was I Made For?"

"I remember thinking, If this works, everyone is going to think later that it was inevitable," Gerwig says. "They'll say, 'Well, but it was Barbie.' But this was not guaranteed."

The success of *Barbie* means that Gerwig now has the rare latitude to write her own ticket in an increasingly risk-averse industry—a freedom that could have been immobilizing. But *Narnia*, Gerwig says, had been gestating for a long time; she'd written a draft before ever setting foot on the set of *Barbie*. "Knowing that I'd laid the groundwork for *Narnia* and wanted to return to it—that's probably something I set up for myself psychologically," she says. "Because I know the right thing, for me anyway, is to keep making movies. Whatever happens, good or bad, you've got to keep going." Hollywood is still reeling from pandemic shutdowns, strikes, and layoffs, facing omnipresent pressure from Wall Street to turn ever higher profits; in a moment like this one, she feels fortunate to get to do what she loves. "It's never not astonishing to me that somebody gives you money to make a movie," she says.

Gerwig's story is as much about commerce as it is about art: her films are humane, emotional, and playful; she is the only director in history to have their first three solo feature films nominated for Best Picture at the Oscars. Yet her movies also clean up at the box office: Her semi-autobiographical solo directorial debut, *Lady Bird*, grossed $79 million against a $10 million budget; her next, an adaptation of Louisa May Alcott's beloved *Little Women*, was budgeted at $40 million and took in $231 million—both extraordinary returns on investment.

These commercial triumphs reflect how her work resonates in the culture, particularly among women and girls, whose emotional lives and ambitions Gerwig explores in her films. But to make her success about gender would be to diminish how her work also transcends its boundaries. "I always think about the intuitive way you love a song or a movie," she says. "You love something, and you just love it. You don't think to yourself, 'I have to love this because it's by a woman, for a woman.' That's part of it. But it's not why you love it." She pauses. "You love it because it's great."

Though she was raised in Sacramento, Gerwig came up as an actor and writer in the New York City independent-film scene. "Really off the grid," she says. "Nobody knew we were making these movies, or cared." That renegade streak is in the DNA of all her work: It takes guts to pitch a vision of Barbie that bluntly contrasts the plastic fantasy of gender equality sold by corporate America with the grim reality for real women. For Gerwig, doing something interesting with what she calls the "known entity" of intellectual property is a healthy challenge: "If you can tell something personal within that structure, you prove you have command over it."

I ask her whether the need to prove her command over this space is something women feel more deeply, for the exact reasons articulated in Ferrera's now famous monologue: There's an uneasy relationship between women and their ambition in a patriarchal society. "I don't know if it's gendered," she says. "But I know I want to be able to make a body of work that feels like it's undeniable in terms of the work itself. I don't want there to be an asterisk next to my name. Do I have more of that than male filmmakers? I don't know! I know plenty of deeply insecure male filmmakers who are plagued in their own ways." (I resist the impulse to ask for their names.)

The question of sexism also haunted the 2024 Oscar race. While Gerwig was nominated for Best Adapted Screenplay, she was shut out of the Best Director category, while *Barbie*'s lead and producer, Margot Robbie, was also excluded from Best Actress, despite being acclaimed for her nuanced, layered performance. Fans wondered: Might the movie, or its star, not look like the Academy's picture of serious filmmaking?

There were also, she points out, ample accolades for the film at the Oscars. "A friend's mom said to me, 'I can't believe you didn't get nominated,'" she says, laughing.

"I said, 'But I did. I got an Oscar nomination.' She was like, 'Oh, that's wonderful for you!' I was like, 'I know!'"

From here, she says, she wants to make movies at every scale, not just those based on existing intellectual property—although she mimes a performance of Louisa May Alcott and C.S. Lewis rolling over in their graves, groaning, after having their literary masterworks described as mere "IP." "There is no genre that Greta wouldn't be great at taking on," says Steven Spielberg, a mentor and longtime admirer who cites "her range of interest in character studies combined with her instincts as a natural entertainer."

After the Oscars, she went back to work on *Narnia*, which she's been studying closely, alongside the other works of C.S. Lewis, as she prepares to write and direct at least two movies set in that world for Netflix. Ted Sarandos, Netflix's CEO, calls Gerwig an "incredible visionary" whose take was clear when they first began talking about *Narnia*. "It won't be counter to how the audience may have imagined those worlds," he says, "but it will be bigger and bolder than they thought." He describes her world building as "rooted in faith," much like Lewis' original material.

Gerwig is drawn to the "euphorically dreamlike" quality of Lewis' writing. "It's connected to the folklore and fairy stories of England, but it's a combination of different traditions," she says. "As a child, you accept the whole thing—that you're in this land of Narnia, there's fauns, and then Father Christmas shows up. It doesn't even occur to you that it's not schematic. I'm interested in embracing the paradox of the worlds that Lewis created, because that's what's so compelling about them."

Yet as much as Gerwig enjoys a paradox—for proof, look no further than "feminist Barbie"—when she talks about movies, this form that she so reveres, it's not esoteric. It's actually really simple. "You don't need specialized knowledge to watch a movie," she says. "All you need is your human experience. Everybody knows what it is to love people, and everybody knows what it is to lose people." In this, she's an optimist—a true believer that the public will rise to the occasion so long as you trust your instincts, and she continues to trust hers.

"There are a lot of smart people who can guide you along and make your movie the best it can be, but at the end of the day, it's always you making the choice," she says. "You're your own Wizard of Oz, in a wonderful way." Then she catches herself. "Hang on. No, I guess the Wizard of Oz is a fraud. He leaves on that balloon. It's Glinda! So maybe you're some combination of Glinda and the man behind the curtain."

Regardless, as is the case with so many great films, the message here is a universal one. "The power was always within you," she says.

Movies—love 'em!

Page 28: *Gerwig at the 2023 Academy Museum of Motion Pictures 3rd Annual Gala in Los Angeles.* ***Left:*** *Accepting the Best Screenplay award at the 2018 Film Independent Spirit Awards for* Lady Bird. ***Above:*** *At the press junket for* Barbie *in Los Angeles in 2023.*

bert Kyncl

FKA TWIGS

Exposing the Dark Side of AI

BY ANNA GORDON

***Left:** At the Chanel Fall 2023 Ready-to-Wear Show in Paris. **Above:** Warner Music Group CEO Robert Kyncl, FKA twigs, and SAG-AFTRA National Executive Director Duncan Crabtree-Ireland are sworn in at a hearing before the U.S. Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Intellectual Property in Washington, D.C., in April 2024.*

IN APRIL 2024, BRITISH SINGER-SONGWRITER FKA twigs, born Tahliah Debrett Barnett, testified before the U.S. Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Intellectual Property about the dangers of artificial intelligence. She relayed that she was especially concerned as an artist whose music and performances are used by third parties to train artificial intelligence models. She said that the power of this technology has become especially apparent to her as she has attempted to build a deepfake version of herself.

"In the past year, I have developed my own deepfake version of myself that is not only trained in my personality, but also can use my exact tone of voice to speak many languages," the singer said in her statement. "I will be engaging my 'AI twigs' later this year to extend my reach and handle my online social media interactions, whilst I continue to focus on my art from the comfort and solace of my studio."

FKA twigs stressed that in certain cases, deepfake technology can be useful and practical, so long as it is used with the consent of the person it is imitating. "These and similar emerging technologies are highly valuable tools both artistically and commercially when under the control of the artist. What is not acceptable is when my art and my identity can simply be taken by a third party and exploited falsely for their own gain without my consent due to the absence of appropriate legislative control," she argued.

The musician especially encouraged those in power to enact legislation to control deepfake technology and warned them not to repeat the mistakes made when the internet was first invented. "Three decades ago, we did not realize that the internet would embed itself so deeply into the core of our everyday lives. Policies and controls to keep pace with the emergence of the technology were not put in place to protect artists, young people, those who are vulnerable," she said.

FKA twigs is not the only person to voice concern about the use of personal intellectual property by generative AI companies. In April 2024, a group of eight American newspapers announced that they would be suing Microsoft and Open AI, the maker of ChatGPT, for using their work as training data without consent.

As of July 2024, the U.S. still does not have any federal laws criminalizing the use of deepfake technology without the permission of the person being impersonated. This has been particularly harmful for people in abusive relationships, who are increasingly becoming victims of revenge pornography using deepfake technology.

In early 2024, deepfake pornographic images of Taylor Swift were widely circulated across social media platform X (formerly Twitter), highlighting the need for new legal protections. Content moderators took them down, bringing the issue to the attention of the public.

ANDRA DAY

Evolving Her Sound

BY MOISES MENDEZ II

WHEN ANDRA DAY STEPPED ONTO THE PODIUM AT Super Bowl LVIII, it was a moment she had waited years to experience—not because she was singing on the biggest television broadcast of the year, but because she was finally given the chance to perform the Black national anthem. For years, Day had been trying to pivot invitations to sing "The Star-Spangled Banner" into an opportunity to perform "Lift Every Voice and Sing."

"I had always been denied," she told TIME in February 2024. "I got to a point where I was like, OK, until I can do that anthem, I don't really want to do it again."

Day, 39, burst onto the scene in 2015 with her song "Rise Up," a rousing power ballad that earned a Grammy nomination and later became an anthem for Black Lives Matter protests. In 2021, in her first leading role in a feature film, she played one of the most legendary singers of all time in director Lee Daniels' *The United States vs. Billie Holiday*, a performance for which she nabbed a Golden Globe and an Oscar nomination while the soundtrack took home a Grammy.

She filmed another movie with Daniels, *The Deliverance*, which was released in August 2024. She also starred in Titus Kaphar's *Exhibiting Forgiveness*, which is set to be released in late 2024. Fans have expressed hopes that she might someday play another influential singer onscreen: Eartha Kitt. "I've heard the calls, and I've been a fan of hers for a long time," Day said.

But Day has spoken about the immense pressure she felt to do justice to Holiday's story, and there was a cost: To capture Holiday's sound, she smoked cigarettes during filming and damaged her voice. It was something she contended with as she prepared for the Super Bowl and in recording her second album—*CASSANDRA (cherith)*—which was released in May 2024 and was a *New York Times* Critic's Pick. "I'm really just trying to heal my voice and learn the new pocket that it's in," she said.

Day performs at the 2024 Beloved Community Awards in Atlanta, Georgia.

BILLIE EILISH

Pursuing Creative Ventures

BY OLIVIA B. WAXMAN

BILLIE EILISH BECAME THE YOUNGEST TWO-time Oscar winner at the age of 22 at the 2024 Academy Awards. Eilish, along with her brother Finneas O'Connell, won the Academy Award for Best Original Song for the power ballad, "What Was I Made For?" from the blockbuster *Barbie*.

"I feel so incredibly lucky and honored," Eilish said, before thanking *Barbie* director Greta Gerwig. "This goes out to everyone that was affected by the movie and how incredible it is."

"What Was I Made For?" sets the mood for the identity crisis Barbie (Margot Robbie) is having throughout the movie. The song also dominated the 2024 Grammys, receiving five nominations and winning Song of the Year and Best Song Written for Visual Media.

The brother-sister team also won the Oscar for Best Original Song in 2022 for "No Time to Die" in the James Bond film by the same name starring Daniel Craig.

In 2018, TIME featured Eilish on its list of the most influential teens, and she described her hope of having a career where she could not only write songs but pursue other creative ventures like designing cars and shoes. She's also a dedicated climate change activist, pioneering ways that musicians can reduce their carbon footprint like feeding her touring crew plant-based meals and powering her 2023 Lollapalooza set with a zero-emissions battery system.

"I can't imagine a life that doesn't involve creativity," she said, "or at least inspiring other people."

Eilish headlines the Pyramid Stage on the third day of the 2024 Glastonbury Festival in England.

SHONDA RHIMES

Ignoring Conventional Wisdom

BY JUDY BERMAN

IN 2022, SHONDA RHIMES AND I WERE DEEP into a conversation about what makes a healthy work environment when she has to stop me from saying something ridiculous. I've been waxing indignant about the professional world's unfair assumption that employees with kids are not fully present at work.

"But I'm not fully present at work," Rhimes, who is TV's highest-paid and, arguably, most successful showrunner, as well as a single mother of three daughters, interjected. We're in the sitting room of a midtown Manhattan hotel suite that, with its tasteful cream-and-wood decor, feels like the natural habitat of Rhimes' elegant *Scandal* heroine, Olivia Pope. I don't need to have kids myself to sense that she's onto something, and I can see her mentally racing toward a more incisive read.

"I don't think anybody who has kids is fully present at work," she told me, speaking as quickly as one of her hypercommunicative characters, but with a deliberateness that suggested she has already processed these thoughts. "The idea of pretending that we have no other life is some sort of fantasy out of the 1950s, where the little lady stayed at home. I don't have a little lady at home. So if I am excelling at one thing, something else is falling off. And that is completely OK."

She's right. How could someone who's responsible for at least one small, vulnerable human—responsible in a real way, not in a '50s-dad way—ever be fully present when that child is out of earshot? The problem isn't that people can't help but bring their whole lives to the office; it's that workplaces fail to accommodate those lives.

This is not the kind of sentiment you expect to hear from a person known for her work ethic. At her most prolific, Rhimes was responsible for producing around 70 episodes of TV across up to four ABC dramas each year. Then in 2017, she signed an industry-shaking deal with Netflix that the parties reupped in 2021 at a reported value of $300 million to $400 million, complete with a "significant raise" and a five-year extension.

It was not a foregone conclusion that her jump from network prime time to the platform that has become the vanguard of the streaming revolution would prove so remarkably successful. In 2017, Netflix was still midway through its own transition from licensing the bulk of its library to producing an endless torrent of original programming. Creators with Rhimes' clout, from Ryan Murphy and *black-ish* mastermind Kenya Barris to Beyoncé and the Obamas, inked their Netflix deals in subsequent years. And instead of immediately cranking out content—as her production company Shondaland did at ABC after forming in 2005, and the way Murphy has done, sometimes to the detriment of his shows' quality—Rhimes slipped off the pop-cultural radar for a few years.

But if one thing has become clear about Rhimes, it's that she has little use for conventional wisdom. And why should she, when her own instincts have so often yielded superior results? *Inventing Anna*, a limited series about the real high-society scammer Anna Delvey which was a Netflix hit, debuted in February 2022. In May 2023, the *Bridgerton* spinoff, *Queen Charlotte: A Bridgerton Story* was released on the platform and was named one of TIME's five best new shows of the month. And in May and June 2024, she released the highly anticipated third season of *Bridgerton*, the steamy Regency romance that is one of Netflix's most-watched original shows ever. (For *Bridgerton*, she stepped back into the role of creator for the first time in the decade since her ABC smash *Scandal*.)

For the millions-strong global audience that not only watches her shows but also listens to Shondaland podcasts and consumes content on *Shondaland.com*—and for the 50 staffers the company employs following the transition to Netflix—Rhimes' approach isn't just effective. It also feels truer to the complexity of human existence in the 21st century than any set of axioms that worked for white guys in gray flannel suits generations ago.

Rhimes attends The Queen's Ball: A Bridgerton Experience in New York in April 2023.

CAITLIN CLARK

Leaving an Untarnished Legacy

BY SEAN GREGORY

AFTER SOUTH CAROLINA HAD THE GAME IN HAND on April 7, 2024, and was about to win its second national championship in three seasons and finish off the 10th undefeated season in the history of women's college basketball, the ESPN on ABC cameras panned to Iowa's Caitlin Clark, who was leaving the court for the last time as an NCAA player. She had just been subbed out, and the Hawkeye-heavy crowd in Cleveland offered her a proper round of applause. The TV screen pointed out the multiple records she set as a collegian: all-time leading scorer in NCAA D1 history, regardless of gender, most points in the NCAA women's basketball tournament, a few others.

South Carolina, which beat Iowa 87-75, had plenty to crow about. The Gamecocks' record over the past three seasons is an incredible 108-3.

But during the team's on-court celebration, coach Dawn Staley—whose defensive adjustments and lineup tweaks after a hot Iowa start slowed down Clark and the Hawkeye attack—saw fit to give Clark quite a shout-out.

"I want to personally thank Caitlin Clark for lifting up our sport," said Staley. "She carried a heavy load for our sport… She's gonna lift that league [WNBA] up… You are one of the GOATs of our game and we appreciate you."

The last time a national-championship coach was so effusive, by name, about the other team's star so soon after the buzzer? I'm going to go with never.

That's the Caitlin Clark effect. Even in defeat, she's the center of attention. Because Staley's correct: Clark had lifted the women's game to new heights. To wit: The Iowa-South Carolina Finals drew a whopping 18.7 million viewers, drawing a bigger audience than every World Series and NBA Finals game in 2023. It was the most-viewed basketball game in ESPN history.

During her final college game, Clark was appointment viewing. She converted one of her three-pointers, during her 18-point first-quarter outburst, from near the half-court logo. Her passing up court is sublime. At times, her Iowa teammates couldn't seem to handle some of her needle-threads on fast breaks.

That won't happen as much in the pros.

The Gamecocks will be remembered as outstanding champions. Clark left college without a title, having lost in the championship game the past two seasons. South Carolina forced her into 10 for 28 shooting. She finished with 30 points. Every shot seemed to be contested. The ones Clark did hit—the near-logo shot, a first-quarter three over South Carolina's 6-foot, 7-inch senior center Kim Cardoso; a few in close with defenders all over her—were impressive.

Now Clark can look forward. A Clark mural was already up in Indianapolis before Clark signed with the Fever as the first draft pick at the end of April. Although they lost their first game of the 2024 WNBA season on May 14 in Connecticut, hundreds of her fans, clad in red Indiana Fever or University of Iowa No. 22 shirts, filled the venue, giving the Connecticut Sun its first sellout for a season opener since 2003, and the most watched WNBA game in more than two decades.

The Las Vegas Aces, the two-time defending champs, moved their July 2, 2024 home game against the Fever from their 12,000-seat home arena to an 18,000-seat one used by the city's NHL team. Others have followed suit. The WNBA is on the upswing: The 2023 season was the most watched in 21 years. Viewership rose 21% year-over-year across ABC, CBS, and the ESPN networks.

Clark is all but guaranteed to keep that momentum going.

In May 2024, Clark signed a deal to become the first female athlete to have a collection with Wilson Sporting Goods Co., which will include signature basketballs, similar to Michael Jordan's deal in the 1980s.

But the Gamecocks showed she's human. Shout-out to Raven Johnson, the South Carolina sophomore guard who shot 1-11 for the game but hounded Clark all night. Johnson offered a blueprint on how to stop Clark. The WNBA was surely watching.

Clark will take her licks in the pros. But let's not forget what the classy Dawn Staley told us: Acknowledge Caitlin Clark's influence, and never forget what she's done.

***Top left:** Clark during a June 2024 game against the Washington Mystics in Washington, D.C.* ***Left:** Clark celebrates after scoring the game-winning shot against Michigan State in Iowa City, Iowa, in January 2024.*

ADA LIMÓN

Sending Poetry into Space

BY LUCY FELDMAN

ADA LIMÓN IS NO STRANGER TO GOOD NEWS. In 2022, she was appointed the 24th poet laureate of the U.S., a role previously held by the likes of Tracy K. Smith, Joy Harjo, and Rita Dove. In spring 2023, she was granted a two-year second term. And in October 2023 came the announcement that she'd won a MacArthur "genius" grant. These are the achievements most writers only dream of—but there was one invitation that even the most inventive of poets would not have imagined: NASA reached out. It wanted Limón to compose an original poem to be launched into space.

"As soon as I hung up, I thought, *Oh, no*," Limón says. The pressure was on. Her poem "In Praise of Mystery: A Poem for Europa" will be engraved inside the *Europa Clipper*, a spacecraft set to launch in October 2024, and begin orbiting Jupiter by 2030. Out of this world though the commission may be, it is a fitting one for a poet dedicated to exploring the ties between the human experience and the universe we all share.

"When I'm in my darkest space, as a poet and as a human, turning to nature is the one thing that will bring me back to myself," Limón says. "It's very hard to write from a place of fear and isolation. If you can, connect to the natural world—a tree, a shrub, whatever you can set your sight on for a moment. We're not alone."

Limón will be embarking on a tour across the U.S. to unveil poetry installations in seven national parks as part of her signature program as poet laureate, dubbed You Are Here—which is also the title of an anthology she published in April 2024. From Washington to Florida, Limón will convene people from all walks of life to celebrate both poetry and the land.

Discovering strangers' hunger for poems has been a key joy of the job, yet the solitary experience of writing remains a singular one for Limón. "As a woman in a body, you're always looking for a safe space," she says. "One of the things that has freed me the most as an artist is that I get to create a safe space on the page. When I watch young women writers discover that for themselves, it's like a whole different kind of freedom."

Limón speaks at an event to honor of the Class of 2022 National Student Poets Program at the White House.

KIM SHUI

Uplifting Women

BY CADY LANG

TO WEAR KIM SHUI IS TO CELEBRATE confidence. The fashion designer, who founded her eponymous brand in 2016, makes clothes for women who aren't afraid to make a statement. Sheer qi paos, daring corset tops, brocade mini dresses with artful cutouts, and curve-hugging trousers with lace-up embellishments have all become staples of her New York City-based brand, which is favored by the likes of Dua Lipa and SZA. Shui's bold style was shaped by her experiences growing up in Rome, where as the American-born daughter of two Chinese immigrants, she was constantly confronted with her otherness. "I didn't have a choice, I just naturally stood out," she told TIME in 2023. "At a certain point, instead of hiding it, I wanted to embrace it and put it at the forefront."

This ethos has informed all aspects of Shui's design. There's her staunch commitment to inclusivity, which manifests in the racially and body-diverse casting of her runway shows and her expansive range of sizes. And then there's her apparel itself, which pays homage to her Chinese heritage with details like mandarin collars and traditional Chinese prints, while slyly challenging conventions around gender and race with her subversive interpretations.

Shui dreamed of becoming a fashion designer since she was a child, but, at the urging of her parents, who thought investment banking would be a more stable path, studied economics and French in college. Having made her way back to her dreams, she now hopes that her clothes, with their multicultural influences, can help start conversations. Most importantly, she wants the women who wear her designs to feel empowered by them. "I want other people to feel great about themselves because that's what fashion has been able to do for me," she says. "It uplifted me and I hope that I can do that for other women too."

Shui at the 2018 Winky Lux X Galore party in New York City.

LACHANZE, CYNTHIA ERIVO, FANTASIA BARRINO

Bringing "I'm Here" to Life

BY MOISES MENDEZ II

Left: LaChanze at the curtain call for The Color Purple *at New York City's Broadway Theater in 2005.* ***Above:*** *LaChanze performs at the 2005 TNT Black Movie Awards.*

THE SONG "I'M HERE" FROM *THE COLOR PURPLE* musical is not meant to be sung, but roared. It's not meant to be heard but felt.

"I'm Here" is the climax of the musical. It reframes the protagonist Celie's narrative from victim to a triumphant woman who has overcome adversity. Up to this moment, Celie has been told that no one loves her. But she begins life on her own in a shop that she owns and realizes that she's been loved all along; now, she chooses to find that love in herself after going through hell and back searching for it elsewhere. The song marks a new beginning—Celie declares that she's here, and boy, are you gonna hear her.

Alice Walker's 1982 novel breathed life into the characters of Celie, Nettie, Sofia, and the rest of the cohort of *The Color Purple*. Whoopi Goldberg portrayed Celie in the 1985 Steven Spielberg-directed adaptation. It wasn't until 2005 that the movie was transformed into a Broadway musical, giving the character of Celie a striking, reflective number with "I'm Here." LaChanze, who originated the role of Celie on Broadway, won the Tony Award for Best Actress in a Leading Role in a Musical in 2006, and set the standard for all Celies to come. In 2007 and 2008, Fantasia Barrino—the first *American Idol* winner to assume a role on Broadway—took over the role for eight months. In 2013, Cynthia Erivo was cast as Celie in an off-West End theater and brought over to Broadway to do the 2015 revival, which earned her a Tony for Best Actress in a Musical, with the show also taking home Best Revival of a Musical.

The three Celies are fundamental for understanding the power behind "I'm Here," a song that requires every fiber of the performer's being to sell its emotional stakes. In December 2023, a wider audience got the chance to fall in love with Celie as Barrino revived the role onscreen in a film adaptation of the musical. In March 2024, the adaptation won a record 11 awards out of 16 nominations at the 55th NAACP Image Awards. Ahead of the movie's release, Barrino, Erivo, and LaChanze, along with the film's director, Blitz Bazawule, spoke with TIME about bringing the song to life on stage and on the screen.

LACHANZE AND CYNTHIA ERIVO SET THE STAGE ON BROADWAY

Before LaChanze was cast in the musical on Broadway and began workshops for the world premiere of the show in Atlanta in 2003, she read the book, and her heart broke for Celie. "She was still a champion; she never faltered under all

that trauma," she said. "[Celie] was able to maintain a love for herself, her children, her sister, in spite of the subjugation she was dealing with." LaChanze came on to the project with Regina Taylor as the writer, but when she arrived at the workshop in New York before the show's premiere in Atlanta, Taylor was replaced with Marsha Norman—who had no book for the show because she had to rewrite it. During the workshop, they worked on a later portion of the show where Celie "decides she is going to love herself," LaChanze said. The three composers (which LaChanze notes is why the song "I'm Here" has three distinct changes in tempo)—Brenda Russell, Allee Willis, and Stephen Bray—spoke with the actress in an adjacent rehearsal studio and asked her to describe how she was feeling.

The words began pouring out of LaChanze, she told TIME. "I said, 'I wanna flirt with somebody, I know I got my sister. She can't be with me. But she's still my sister, and I know she loves me and my children,'" she recalls telling the composers. "I didn't put it together in the way they did, but my feelings, my emotions, and my thoughts about what I was experiencing as the actor embodying Celie they put in the song. So I like to say I helped write the song."

Singing "I'm Here" eight times a week on Broadway when it came to New York in 2005 was a cathartic experience for LaChanze. Her husband died in the 9/11 attacks, and she was a single mother to two young children. She was able to "use Celie's emotions as an outlet" for the pressure she felt in her life, she said, adding that she looked forward to singing the song every night because she thought about who was being changed by the words she sang. "Yes, it's moving, it's emotional, it's heavy. But it's an anthem to Black womanhood, survival, resilience, and empowerment, so it was joyous for me in the end."

The original run of the show ended in 2008, and in late 2015, the revival came back to Broadway with Cynthia Erivo filling Celie's shoes after starting out in the U.K. Erivo's performance as Celie was lauded by critics. In 2016, she won the Tony Award for her role, but it didn't come easily. "With [*The Color Purple*], essentially it's two and a half hours of being thrown across the stage and being called ugly, and for me, that was eight shows a week for 14 months," she says. "Because of the way I like to dig into characters, the line becomes really blurry between what's real and what's not."

Erivo says that before she sang that song, she imagined digging her feet into the sand to ground herself, anchoring herself to Celie, as she sang. "I could feel everyone holding their breath as the song goes on," she says. "And you can feel everyone breathe by the end of the song. I knew that when people were on their feet, it wasn't just because of how wonderful the song was or how wonderful Celie was. It was because there was something in that song that moved people to their feet because that's the only thing they can do."

On days when she found it difficult to sing "I'm Here," Erivo said she reminded herself that the song wasn't just for her. "It's not supposed to be an easy song to sing. There has to be a bit of a fight. The song wrestles with you, and you kind of have to surrender to it and say, 'Okay, I'll take the fight on.'"

HOW FANTASIA BARRINO AND BLITZ BAZAWULE CAPTURED THE MAGIC OF "I'M HERE" FOR THE MOVIE

Fantasia Barrino initially declined to reprise her role as Celie in the movie adaptation—she'd like to clarify that it wasn't a hard no, but says that it was the director, Blitz Bazawule, who convinced her to sign on to the project by telling her Celie's imagination would be given more space in the film. "As a woman who has been through trauma, we need for people to know that we don't just sit in our trauma; we imagine ourselves in different places and situations," Barrino said. "We imagine things better. When we ain't got no money, we imagine ourselves with some money." After that, she said, she was all the way in.

When it came to filming "I'm Here," Barrino says she sang the song live 86 times on set. There were two different setups for the film—the interior shot of Celie's shop on a soundstage and the exterior, which was shot on location in Georgia, Bazawule says. It was freezing cold when they filmed—Barrino says what got her through was the support she was given by her castmates and crew. Halle Bailey, who plays young Nettie, and Phylicia Pearl Mpasi, who plays young Celie, came to set on their day off to watch her film her performance. At first, she was confused about why they would come to watch her shoot the scene, but after a couple of takes, she said, "They would all walk up to me and say, 'I needed this. You blessed me. This heals me.' I realized it was a ministry."

Bazawule said he was looking for an earnest performance from Barrino. "The minute she looked into that camera and sang, 'I'm beautiful,' and her voice broke, I thought, 'That's it. I got it,'" he said. "I was behind the monitor tearing up, so I know that anybody watching it in a theater would tear up, and that, to me, is what this is about."

Left: *Erivo appears on* The View *in 2016.* ***Right:*** *Barrino, along with the rest of the cast, surprises Veronica Calderone, the 1 millionth audience member at Broadway's* The Color Purple *in New York City in 2007.*

NEWJEANS

Taking K-pop by Storm

BY CHAD DE GUZMAN

IN MAY 2023, HYEIN JUST TURNED 15, BUT HER birthday wish was unusually purposeful for a teenager: "I want to show more of my skills and different sides of me that I haven't shown yet," she said. This youthful drive to keep growing is a common denominator among Hyein and her NewJeans bandmates: Minji, Haerin, Hanni, and Danielle, who were all under 20.

Since it dropped its first music video in August 2022, the K-pop girl group—managed by the record label ADOR, a subsidiary of the South Korean entertainment behemoth HYBE, which launched boy band BTS —has reached global milestones even faster than its more senior counterparts in the industry. Two of NewJeans' singles stayed on the *Billboard* 100 for five weeks in 2023, and in March of the same year, the band became the fastest Korean act ever to hit 1 billion streams on Spotify (just 219 days), despite having released only a handful of songs. In July 2023, they released their second EP, *Get Up*. It peaked at No. 1 on the U.S. *Billboard* 200, and a month later, the band was the first K-pop girl group to perform at Lollapalooza. The group released two singles, "How Sweet" and "Supernatural," in 2024, and hosted their second sold-out fan meeting at the Tokyo Dome. The two-day event attracted more than 91,000 attendees. They also took home their second Artist of the Year award at the 2024 The Fact Music Awards in Osaka, Japan. The event recognizes key figures in the K-pop genre. *The Korea Times* reported that NewJeans plans to release another album at the end of 2024 and launch a world tour in 2025.

NewJeans' popularity isn't exactly surprising. ADOR CEO Min Hee-jin was once responsible for the branding of many enduring names in the K-pop world like Shinee, EXO, and Girls' Generation. Now helming her own label, Min has spoken of breaking established industry expectations, which resonated with NewJeans members. (The band's name is a wordplay on "new genes"—as in the next generation of K-pop—and the timeless style of denim.)

"We're always trying to create a fresh vibe," said Danielle of NewJeans' distinctive style. Clear Y2K influences appear in their fashion and their songs, produced by musicians known for their experimental, more underground discography. "This is new, but it's also bringing back all these memories from the past."

As cutthroat as the K-pop industry is said to be, the members of NewJeans are happy to take things in stride. They're focused on enjoying the process and just making music that they want to hear. "K-pop is such a big thing," Hanni said. "I don't know if you could really even predict what it's going to be in the future."

NewJeans performs at the Billboard *Women in Music 2024 event in Inglewood, California.*

MELANIE PERKINS

Designing a Brighter Future

BY SIMMONE SHAH

MELANIE PERKINS, CO-FOUNDER AND CEO of the online graphic-design tool Canva, has a two-pronged plan for success. First, build one of the world's most valuable companies. Next, do as much good in the world as possible.

The two goals "fuel each other," Perkins told TIME in 2023. The philosophy might seem like an odd North Star for a company offering templates for presentations and save-the-date cards, but it's just one way Perkins is reimagining the modern tech company.

Headquartered in Sydney, thousands of miles away from Silicon Valley, with its reputation as a global arbiter of innovation, Perkins has built a design platform that easily rivals those offered by giants like Adobe and Microsoft, all while keeping accessibility at the heart of its mission.

After launching in 2013, Canva has grown to offer services in over 100 languages, with 125 million users in 190 countries. The company operates on a "freemium" subscription model that includes basic features at no cost, with the option to pay for upgrades. They also provide free subscriptions to educational organizations and nonprofits. The company counts 85% of Fortune 500 companies among its users, but Perkins believes the most salient examples of the company's impact are in how it's changed everyday lives—from refugees using the platform to design résumés as they job hunt in a new country, to a woman creating a flyer that helped her track down her birth mother.

In 2018—the year Canva joined the ranks of "unicorn" startups valued at over $1 billion—just 9% of those new companies had at least one female founder. Recent numbers are likewise dismal: In 2021, the number was only 14%.

Perkins has been comfortable going against the grain. "There's always been forks in the road [where we could] do what every other company is doing, or just do what feels natural. Every time we do what feels natural, it always ends up being the thing that we build on."

Perkins sits for a photo session in Sydney, Australia, in 2023.

FLORENCE PUGH

Saving the "Movie Star"

BY ELIANA DOCKTERMAN

Left: *Pugh at the 2024 world premeire of* Dune: Part Two *in London.* ***Above:*** *Posing at the 2023* Oppenheimer *U.K. premiere in London.*

WHEN FLORENCE PUGH WAS A CHILD, SHE HATED to cry in public. If she had an argument with her parents, she would run to the bathroom, lock the door, and sit under the sink. Only then would she weep. "When I started acting I remember thinking, 'Ooh, this isn't good news' because we all know how amazing it feels when you see the character you've been following finally crumble," she says. "And I just couldn't do it."

Now she cries so often in movies that it's become something of a meme—her guttural wails in *Midsommar*, her blubbering in *Little Women*, and her screams in *Don't Worry Darling* have all gone viral. Because a childhood illness affected her breathing, Pugh still has a gravelly voice that lends itself to anguish. She used to imagine her family in coffins to achieve the ultimate ugly cry: "I never wanted it to be prissy. For me, it's snot or nothing." But she's no one-trick pony: Equally adept at comedy and action, she has appeared in superhero flicks and indies. She's a magnetic and multifaceted onscreen presence, the kind that doesn't come around very often.

Pugh's career has taken off. On the heels of *A Good Person*—a drama written and directed by her ex-partner, Zach Braff, which she also produced—she starred in cri cally acclaimed movies: Christopher Nolan's *Oppenheimer*, for which she won a Screen Actors Guild Award for Outstanding Cast in a Motion Picture, and Denis Villeneuve's *Dune: Part Two*. Both are the sorts of epics that Hollywood rarely makes anymore, especially in an era when franchises, not movie stars, sell tickets.

Studios and directors are fretting that the theatrical experience may die if a new crop of young stars can't lure audiences. A 2023 National Research Group survey asked moviegoers to name the actors who could get them to a movie theater. The top answers all qualify for AARP cards: Tom Cruise (61), Dwayne Johnson (52), and Tom Hanks (67). Villeneuve says he cast *Dune: Part Two* with the future of cinema in mind. "I needed people who have the necessary charisma," he says. "I think Florence, Zendaya, Timothée [Chalamet], and Austin [Butler], they will be the new power in Hollywood. These strong, charismatic figures will drag people back to the theater."

Pugh has charisma to spare. Along with her famous frown, she deploys her infectious smile at opportune moments, often on the tiny screens where our social feeds scroll. She glowed in royal purple Valentino, a knowing grin on her face and Aperol spritz in her hand, as she strutted around Venice in 2022, the same day the director she was allegedly feuding with, Olivia Wilde, had to explain why Pugh was absent from a *Don't Worry Darling* press conference. She beamed when she debuted a new buzz cut at the Met Gala in 2023. And she gleefully called out trolls who scolded her for wearing a transparent dress that showed her nipples on the red carpet.

Her smile betrays a confidence near impossible to achieve for someone under 30. She's honed her control of her emotions into an art for delicate scenes. "Despite her youth, she has a drive and assurance," says Villeneuve. "You feel you're working with someone who can absolutely go anywhere and do anything emotionally in the most subtle and precise way. She's a raw diamond."

Pugh and I met at Locanda Verde, an Italian restaurant in Tribeca in 2023. The green juice she ordered keeps separating, and Pugh mindlessly stirs the concoction back together before each sip. Pugh ate here with her parents the night before and requested a table in the corner. The waiter solemnly informed her that that spot was reserved for Robert De Niro, a co-owner. She kept an eager eye out for the megastar all night.

People speak of legends like De Niro in hushed tones. But Pugh argues we need to let go of the concept of the enigmatic movie star: With rare exceptions like Beyoncé, public figures today simply cannot maintain an air of mystery. Luckily Pugh is particularly adept at social media. She started her career posting videos to YouTube singing and playing guitar in her childhood bedroom in Oxford. Success has changed little about her approach.

In the cheeky "Cooking With Flo" Instagram videos that rose to popularity during quarantine, Pugh offered tips gleaned from her restaurateur father. She is designing her kitchen in her new London home with more cooking videos—and even a possible TV series—in mind. "Conversations are happening," she says of a cooking show. "If I were to make something, I wouldn't want it to be polished or clean or fussy."

Her entire image is messy by design. She posts as many photos of sprouting zits as red carpets. Followers might assume this is a bid for relatability. But she's trying to maintain control of her image in a tabloid landscape that glorifies actors' movie-premiere glamour one day and mocks their bad hair day the next. "I would never show one side of me because that's setting myself up to fail," she says. "I don't want anyone to make money catching me out being me. I want to give them all of me."

Pugh learned early the value of defining your own public persona. After her film debut in the 2014 drama *The Falling*, she landed a pilot for a show that never went forward—a blessing considering producers asked her to change her body. She refused and decided she would not return to Hollywood until she had a better grasp of what she wanted to represent. After a breakout role as the dastardly protagonist in the British period drama *Lady Macbeth*, she was drawn back to Los Angeles to play opposite Dwayne Johnson in the WWE film *Fighting with My Family*.

"The person I came back to was a female wrestler with muscles and big thighs who made her own name as a champion," she says. "I quite liked that because the last time I'd been there I was told I needed to lose weight—it was just so not the person I wanted to be." Pugh has worked with lauded directors like Park Chan-wook (*The Little Drummer Girl*), Greta Gerwig (*Little Women*), and Ari Aster (*Midsommar*), portraying strong-willed women who fight against society's expectations.

"Even if they're not defined on the page, I always find some way to make them quite confrontational," she says of her characters. "I never see the bad in them—even when they have killed children and burned boyfriends. I've always understood them as people that needed to do what they had to do to survive."

If Pugh knows when to fight, she also intuits when to stay mum. Rumors swirled in 2022 about drama on the set of *Don't Worry Darling*, the film directed by Wilde—particularly regarding how Wilde's then rumored relationship with Pugh's co-star Harry Styles and casting decisions were causing tension. Pugh seemed to float above the controversy. Buried in the tepid reviews of the film were raves for Pugh's empathetic take on a woman trapped in a '50s male fantasy. Despite the fervent gossip—or because of it—*Don't Worry Darling* made almost $90 million at the box office, a feat for an adult drama.

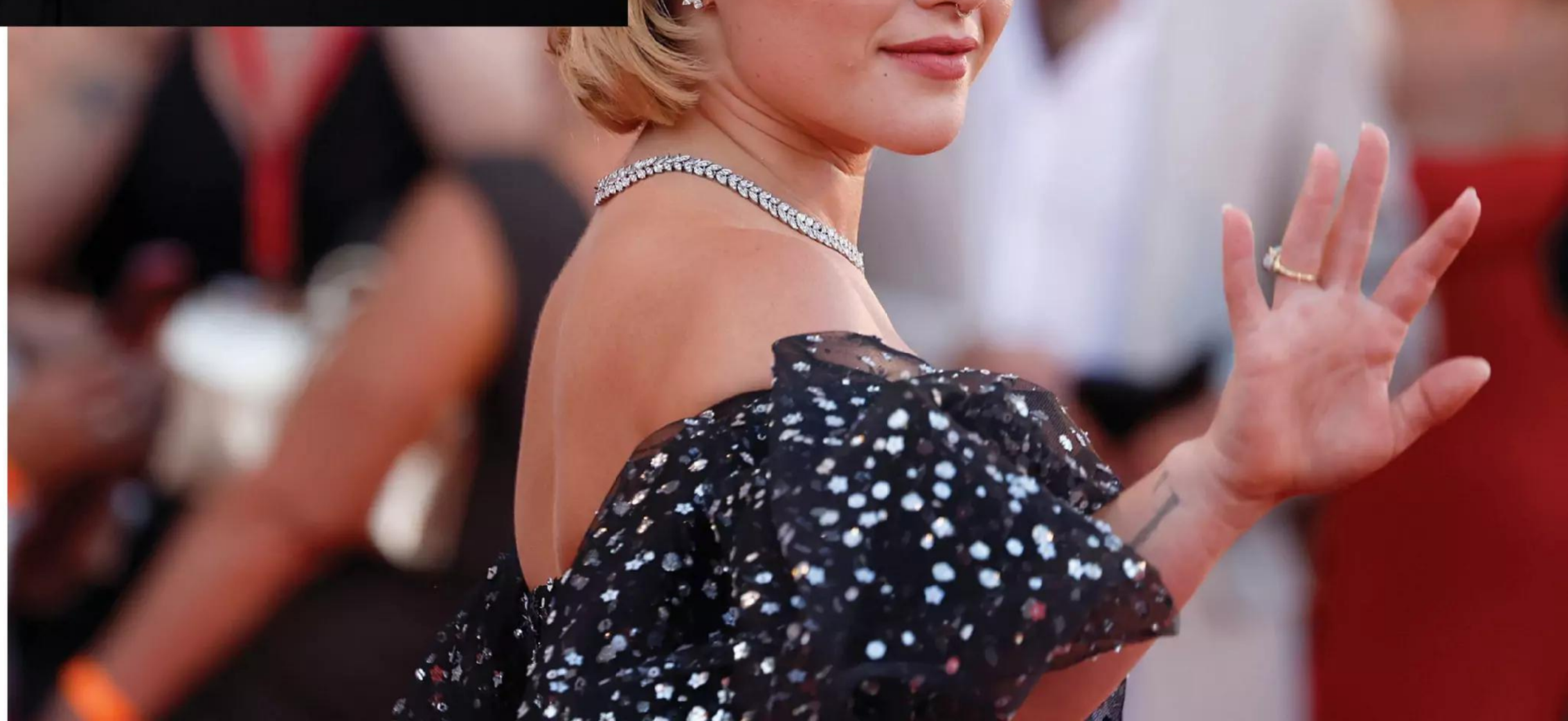
Pugh is building a career on films that run the gamut from scrappy indie shoots to mega blockbuster productions. No matter the scope, after a decade in the business, Pugh can sense whether a film will succeed based on vibes alone. Has she ever thought, while on set, that a movie was simply falling apart? "Definitely," she says. "A whole film set, it's everybody making a huge effort because they want to be there. And if someone doesn't want to be there or if someone isn't pulling their weight, you can feel it. The film feels wrong." I start to press for specifics and she—exceedingly politely—moves on to a related topic.

Her experiences on gigantic projects with Nolan and Villeneuve set a high bar. "He has the utmost respect for every single person working on that set," she says of Nolan. And she calls Villeneuve a "bizarre, mad, creative genius" for his ability to render the fantastical world of *Dune* onscreen.

Villeneuve, in turn, describes Pugh as a rambunctious kid: "She's mischievous." Pugh confirms that she and Chalamet, who starred in *Little Women* together, had to be separated on the *Dune* set because they were having too much fun. But don't let her playfulness deceive you, Villeneuve warns. Once the cameras roll, "she has firepower." Her peers and fans agree: She's earned nods from the Oscars, BAFTAs, and the Cannes Film Festival, and effusive support from 9.4 million Instagram followers.

Actors who enter the Superhero Industrial Complex can end up trapped in an endless series of interconnected films and shows. After her debut as Black Widow's sister Yelena in 2021's *Black Widow*, Pugh made a cameo in the Disney+ show *Hawkeye* and just finished up shooting the Marvel ensemble movie *Thunderbolts* with Harrison Ford. But in between, she earned a slew of nominations and the

Below: *Pugh at the Valentino Haute Couture Spring/Summer 2024 show during Fashion Week in Paris.* ***Below right:*** *On the red carpet at the 2022 Venice International Film Festival.*



2023 British/Irish Actress of the Year Award from the London Film Critics' Circle for her small Netflix film *The Wonder*.

"So many people in the indie film world were really pissed off at me. They were like, 'Great, now she's gone forever,'" she says. "And I'm like, no, I'm working as hard as I used to work. I've always done back-to-back movies. It's just people are watching them now. You just have to be a bit more organized with your schedule."

Her future will, she hopes, involve time on the stage. She wrote and performed music in *A Good Person* and wants to sing again. She's working on a love story produced by A24 opposite Andrew Garfield called *We Live in Time*. She is open to a rom-com—and if anyone can help bring back a genre on life support, it's an actor disproving the thesis that movie stars are a dying breed.

We finish our breakfast, leaving behind the half-drunk glass of green juice. Pugh heads to a photo shoot where she finds a more appetizing drink, another Aperol spritz. A couple hours later, her parents, grandmother, and Braff pop by for a visit, and Pugh beckons her Gran—who has joined her on several red carpets—to sit beside her. The actor plucks two straws from a cup and sticks them in the spritz so the duo can sip it together. Pugh laughs and applauds as her grandmother dramatically curtsies for the crew. All smiles, no tears.

NARGES MOHAMMADI

Fighting for Oppressed Women

BY ARMANI SYED

JAILED HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST NARGES Mohammadi, then 51, was awarded the 2023 Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of her fight against the oppression of Iran's women and her fight to promote human rights and freedom for all.

Berit Reiss-Andersen, head of the Norwegian Nobel Committee began the announcement with "Zan. Zendegi. Azadi. Women. Life. Freedom," drawing on the motto used by Iran's protesters who took to the streets en masse since the September 2022 death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini while in police custody after she was arrested for allegedly wearing her headscarf too loosely.

Announcing Mohammadi's selection, Reiss-Andersen said: "Her brave struggle has come with tremendous personal cost. All together, the regime has arrested her 13 times, convicted her 5 times, and sentenced her to a total of 31 years in prison, and 154 lashes." She emphasized that Mohammadi was still in jail at that exact moment, and as of July 2024, she was still behind bars.

In a statement sent to the *New York Times*, Mohammadi shared her reaction to winning the prize: "The global support and recognition of my human rights advocacy makes me more resolved, more responsible, more passionate and more hopeful," she told the publication. "I also hope this recognition makes Iranians protesting for change stronger and more organized. Victory is near."

WHO IS NARGES MOHAMMADI?

Mohammadi began her reform activism in local journalism, but she is best known for her involvement with the Defenders of Human Rights Center—founded by Nobel Peace Prize laureate Shirin Ebadi—since 2003. Before her arrest, she served as vice president of the human rights organization. Mohammadi has been repeatedly arrested for her work in assisting incarcerated activists and their families, with the first instance dating back to 2011.

After being released on bail in 2013, Mohammadi began campaigning for the abolition of the death penalty in Iran. Iran was second only to China for known executions in 2023, at more than 853, according to a report by Amnesty International published in May 2024.

Mohammadi is currently serving multiple sentences amounting to 12 years in Tehran's notorious Evin prison. "Upon her return to prison, she began opposing the regime's systematic use of torture and sexualized violence against political prisoners, and especially women, that is practised in Iranian prisons," Reiss-Andersen said.

Mohammadi has played her part in the mass protest movement in Iran since Amini's death, organizing solidarity events with other political prisoners. She also managed to smuggle out an article which was published in the *New York Times* in September 2023, in which she explained the environment of the prison when news of the protests reached them.

Concluding her speech, Reiss-Andersen said that Mohammadi's selection also recognized hundreds of thousands of protestors who have resisted the Iranian regime. "Only by embracing equal rights for all, can the world achieve the fraternity between nations that Alfred Nobel sought to promote," she said.

Mohammadi is the 19th woman, and second Iranian woman, to win the Nobel Peace Prize.

Mohammadi had been included in the annual shortlist by Henrik Urdal, director of the Peace Research Institute Oslo, as one of his first picks for the 2023 prize. "We were delighted to see a human rights defender win the prize this year, and it was [the] first on our shortlist," Urdal told TIME after the announcement. "We hope today's prize will send a clear message to world leaders including the United States that international pressure is needed to improve the lives of girls and women in Iran."

Mohammadi in 2021, before she returned to prison.

E. JEAN CARROLL

Offering Hope to Survivors

BY CADY LANG

ONE OF THE 2024 TIME100 MOST INFLUENTIAL people in the world, E. Jean Carroll, was surprised that she was included on the list—but she shouldn't have been. In 2023, Carroll made headlines when she was awarded $5 million after a Manhattan jury found former President Donald Trump liable for defamation and sexual abuse in a lawsuit she filed against him for an alleged rape in the 1990s, giving hope to survivors for justice. In January 2024, a jury found Trump liable for defamation against Carroll for his remarks after the first verdict and ordered him to pay her another $83.3 million. Trump appealed the verdict and posted a $91.6 million bond.

Carroll is one of more than 20 women who have accused Trump of sexual misconduct since the 1980s. Trump has denied all the allegations—including Carroll's—and hers was the first of the claims that has been successfully tried before a jury.

While attending the TIME100 Gala, Carroll weighed in on Trump's hush money criminal trial, which was underway in a downtown Manhattan court. Carroll was hopeful that Trump's trial would bring to light the truth about the former president's actions.

"I think that it's a New York jury, they're the smartest in the world, with all political backgrounds," she told TIME at the April 2024 event. "They will make the right decision." In May 2024, Trump was convicted of all 34 felony counts related to the hush money trial. The former president and his legal team have said that they will appeal.

Regarding the 2024 presidential election, Carroll also stressed the importance of voters considering which candidates would reflect their values, especially when it came to the future of reproductive rights. "The main question we need to ask of our candidates is: Do women have the rights over their own bodies?" she said.

Tarana Burke, founder of the #MeToo movement, wrote in her TIME100 tribute to Carroll, "The triumph of E. Jean Carroll starts with her disclosures—here was this woman from the self-described 'silent generation' ripping off the gag. She embodied what #MeToo was actually about: not a woman taking down a powerful man, but a woman freeing herself. And in E. Jean's case, it just so happens, freeing millions more alongside her. We like to count women's days and then count them out. That's impossible to do with E. Jean. Her moves are undeniably heroic."

Carroll leaving the Manhattan federal courthouse after closing arguments in her lawsuit against former president Donald Trump in May 2023.

TAYLOR SWIFT

Owning Her Story

BY SAM JACOBS

SINCE 1927, TIME HAS CHOSEN A PERSON OF the Year, the editors' assessment of the individual who most shaped the headlines over the previous 12 months, for better or for worse.

As a tradition, Person of the Year springs from the Great Man Theory of history, a belief that individuals have the power to transform society. The selections over the years have tended to follow certain patterns. The person chosen has typically been a ruler over traditional domains of power. He—and yes, usually it has been a "he"—is very often a politician or a titan of industry. Fourteen U.S. Presidents, five leaders of Russia or the Soviet Union, and three Popes have all been recognized.

continued ▸

And yet the person whose singular influence was revealed throughout 2023 has held none of these roles—or anything remotely similar. Every year contains light and dark; 2023 was a year with significant shares of darkness. In a divided world, where too many institutions are failing, Taylor Swift found a way to transcend borders and be a source of light. No one else on the planet today can move so many people so well. Achieving this feat is something we often chalk up to the alignments of planets and fates, but giving too much credit to the stars ignores her skill and her power.

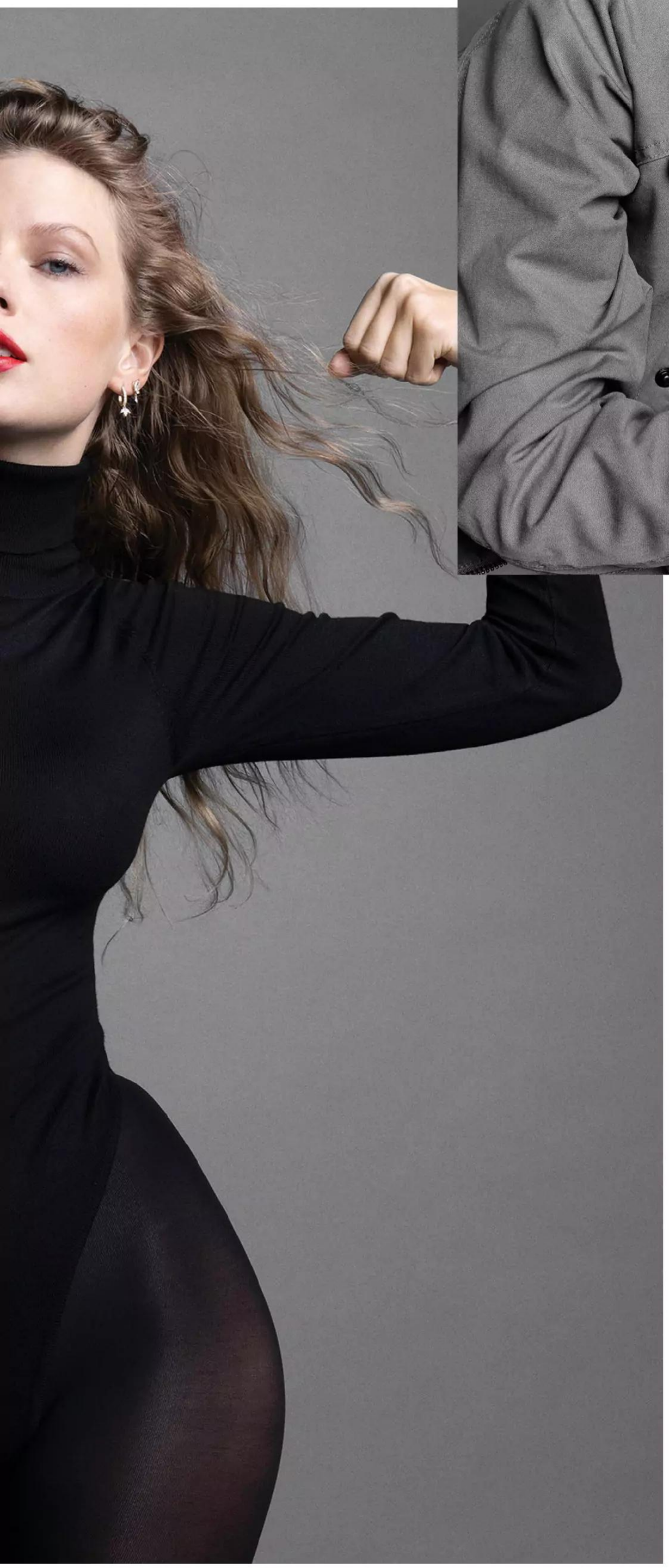
Swift is the rare person who is both the writer and hero of her own story. Her path is untraveled, something she's known for some time. "I can't find anyone, really, who's had the same career trajectory as mine," Swift told us in 2014 when she first appeared on the cover of TIME upon releasing her fifth album, 1989. "So when I'm in an optimistic place I hope that my life won't match anyone else's life trajectory, either."

While her popularity has grown across the decades, 2023 was the year that Swift, then 33, achieved a kind of nuclear fusion: shooting art and commerce together to release an energy of historic force. She did it by embracing what she does better than anyone, entertaining and writing songs that connect with people. She was the first Person of the Year to be recognized for her success in the arts, in a year when we were reawakened to questions about who makes and who owns our cultural expressions. Swift is also a symbol of generational change: She is only the fourth solo Person of the Year born in the past half century.

Since her debut album in 2006, Swift has notched more No. 1 albums than any other woman in history. In 2023 alone she had three. She was everywhere, filling stadiums and breaking records, which meant we were forced to find novel ways to measure the magnitude of her reach. Seismograms were deployed to show the literal impact caused by her fans. As Swift reportedly became a billionaire, countries' gross domestic products became the yardstick for her financial contributions. University classes to study Swift's lessons in literature, business, and law were announced. Swift was showered with keys to cities and street signs changed to her name.

World leaders and mayors competed to bring her monumentally successful Eras Tour to their jurisdictions. Swift has become a feature of American soft power: A U.S. diplomat told me how meaningful it was to get Swift to agree to play in his host country. And Swift, as we now know, has had a Midas touch, improving the fortunes of every place she visits and business she celebrates. Just ask the NFL about its millions of new fans. Or your secretary of state: Tens of thousands of fans registered to vote after she encouraged them on Instagram, spiking visits to *Vote.org*. "She's done a great job of sticking to her guns and being vocal and political in the ways that she wants to," says the Chicks' front woman Natalie Maines.

At the same time, much of what Swift accomplished exists beyond measurement. She mapped her journey and shared the results with the world: She committed to validating the dreams, feelings, and experiences of people, especially women, who felt overlooked and regularly underestimated. They know she respects her audience,



and trusts them with her story. She held up a mirror to her own life, helping people better see themselves. She embraced her past, foibles and all, and in doing so encouraged others to do the same.

While Swift's success can feel like a counterweight to traditional forms of power, the secret to her mastery has ancient roots. She is writing her own myth, informed by her own journey. And it has been an epic. So many have turned to those tales because they've been so disappointed by the storylines that emerge elsewhere in society. Any student of that Great Man Theory of history knows how deeply intertwined it is with centuries of sexism and the exclusion of women from power. Indeed, this isn't the first time Swift has been part of TIME Person of the Year; in 2017, she was among the "Silence Breakers" we recognized for standing up and speaking out against discrimination, harassment, and assault faced by too many women for far too long.

Swift has been both avatar and author of shifting narratives, never more so than in 2023. Where do they take us? It might look something like what Swift has created, making a space for 70,000 people, night after night, to experience joy together. What is a higher form of influence, after all, than giving millions of fans, young and old, the time of their lives, where they can revel not only in Swift's voice but in finding their own? These moments were all the more magical for taking place as we exited a pandemic, rediscovering the communal experiences that were so recently taken from us.

For building a world of her own that made a place for so many, for spinning her story into a global legend, for bringing joy to a society desperately in need of it, Taylor Swift was named TIME's 2023 Person of the Year.

Page 55, Left, and Above: *Swift is photographed for TIME's 2023 Person of the Year issue.*

SERENA WILLIAMS

Forging Her Own Path

BY SEAN GREGORY

Left: Williams after winning a point against Romania's Simona Halep during the 2021 Australian Open. ***Above:*** *Training with her father, Richard Williams, in South Central Los Angeles when she was nine years old.*

THE GREATEST FEMALE ATHLETE OF ALL TIME—check that: perhaps the greatest athlete of all time—told TIME in 2022 that she had been thinking a lot about the reason she's vowed to hang up her racket for good.

"Olympia doesn't like when I play tennis," Serena Williams said plainly about her daughter, Alexis Olympia Ohanian Jr. When Williams told Olympia, who turned 5 shortly after the TIME interview, that she was soon to be done with the life that made her an inspiration to millions, Olympia's reply was as joyful as her mother's celebrations after so many Grand Slam wins: a fist-pumping "Yes!"

"That kind of makes me sad," said Williams, leaning forward in her chair in the library of a New York City hotel. "And brings anxiety to my heart." No kid understands their parent's absence. But Williams has spent the last few years of her incomparable career tormented by what she's been sacrificing in order to keep going. "It's hard to completely commit," she said, "when your flesh and blood is saying, Aw."

Olympia also wanted to be a big sister. One day she blew on a dandelion, wishing for a baby sister. "This is what I have to deal with, on a daily," Williams said, with the commiseration familiar to all parents of young kids. And yet choosing this path requires a calculus that superstar fathers don't have to make. Tom Brady, father of three, could retire and unretire at 44; LeBron James, father of three, could sign a two-year, $97.1 million contract extension at 37. "It comes to a point where women sometimes have to make different choices than men, if they want to raise a family," said Williams, who turned 41 that fall. "It's just black and white. You make a choice or you don't."

Biology may have forced her hand, but Williams insisted she was at peace with her decision. "There is no anger," she said. "I'm ready for the transition." She thought about what's next, without knowing how it would feel. Williams re-directed her curiosity and drive into her investment firm, Serena Ventures. She kindled her spiritual life. And Olympia got her wish: Serena gave birth to a second daughter, Adira River, in August 2023. She evolved as a mom. "I think I'm good at it," she said of parenthood. "But I want to explore if I can be great at it."

Greatness is something she knows well. No tennis player, male or female, has won more major championships in the Open Era—the period starting in 1968 when the Grand Slam tournaments allowed professionals—than Serena Williams. (Australia's Margaret Court owns the all-time record, with 24 Grand Slams.) Williams earned 10 of those 23 titles after the age of 30, a time when most players retire or plummet in the rankings. But for all that Williams accomplished on the court, it's what she has meant off the court that makes her the most consequential athlete of the 21st century, full stop. She, along with older sister Venus, took over a country-club sport with resistance to a pair of Black sisters from Compton, California, baked into its DNA. She helped change behavioral expectations for female athletes, and by extension women in all workplaces, by exuding power and passion—and bringing her full self—to her hard-court office. She rewrote the book on body image. When pundits, racists, and no small number of idiots slurred

her physical appearance or laughed her off as "masculine," she doubled down on photo shoots and flexes.

Her very being sparked a multitude of crucial conversations. In 2018, her run to the Wimbledon final—months after Olympia's delivery led to a life-threatening pulmonary embolism and hematoma that required multiple surgeries—inspired millions of moms. But that chatter shifted, in an instant. On a September afternoon, a male umpire penalized Williams for a verbal outburst at a key moment in the U.S. Open final. She argued that men got away with much worse. Serena lost to Naomi Osaka, and the fallout prompted debates about decorum, fair play, gender discrimination, racial discrimination, letter of the law, spirit of the law, and unconscious biases.

All from a Serena Williams tennis match.

Osaka, who has since won three more Grand Slams, never would have picked up a tennis racket if it weren't for Williams. "I remember as a kid watching in awe, and I was so happy to be seeing a strong Black woman on my screen," she told TIME in 2022. "Even though she is retiring, her legacy definitely lives on through Coco [Gauff], Sloane [Stephens], Madison [Keys], and other women of color at the top of their game. Serena is unequivocally the best athlete ever. Forget female athlete, I mean athlete. No one else has changed her sport as much as she did and against all odds."

When informed of Osaka's comment during our late-August 2022 conversation in New York, Williams demurred when the talk turned to being the greatest of all time. That is, up to a point.

"I don't know any other person that has won a Grand Slam or a championship in the NBA or anything else nine weeks pregnant," she said. She laughed, a habit when she wants to make a serious point. "A two-week event. That tournament, I relied on my brain. An athlete isn't just about what an animal you are physically, like a specimen. It's using everything. Your mind, your body, everything. And doing that for 20 years. And doing it against people that come against you and play the best game of their life. Every single time."

"You can come to your own conclusion after that."

The Williams sisters' backstory is filled with tales of their competitive exploits. "There was a rage, a burning desire that I've never seen in two little girls, ever," said Rick Macci, one of Venus and Serena's earliest coaches. "And I haven't seen to this day."

Richard Williams' genius was that while many tennis dads suffocate their children, he nurtured their talent while encouraging them to be kids. On rainy days at Macci's Florida training facility, they'd study in his office. Richard kept them off the junior circuit, on the advice of absolutely no one. After they faced Hall of Fame legends Billie Jean King and Rosie Casals in an exhibition doubles match, Macci heard both sisters complimenting their own performances. He turned around. Venus, 11, and Serena, 10, were talking to a doll.

Childlike curiosity intact, the sisters went on to learn multiple languages and diversify their interests. Serena has dabbled in finance, fashion, acting, and film production; she's on track to be the first female athlete to become a billionaire. Early in her career, she faced criticism for moonlighting outside of tennis. She was supposedly unfocused, distracted. She again rewrote the rules. Expanding her palette prevented the burnout that previously plagued so many players. No woman has won more big matches in her later years.

Williams conquered her first major, the 1999 U.S. Open, at 17. "It really was a different mentality of tennis," said Chris Evert, the 18-time major champion. "Go for everything. When you're under pressure, you're more aggressive." Serena and Venus wore braids with beads in those early years on tour. Even this seemingly small fashion choice carried meaning. "The tennis world was not accustomed to seeing Black girls show up adorned in styles reflecting their African American cultural heritage, as opposed to wearing styles that blended in," said Tera Hunter, a professor of African American studies at Princeton University.

Around this time, Williams met Kelly Rowland, of the pop supergroup Destiny's Child, after a concert. She invited Rowland to come to a match. "I'm going to be really good," Serena vowed. "As soon as she said that, I was struck by her," Rowland told TIME. She remembers sitting in Serena's box during a match when she was down a set. "You feel an energy shift," said Rowland. "Something's about to happen. It's watching her get upset, like we do as people, and then understanding she had to calm herself down. It was her having this controlled kind of space she had made for herself. And then it was about her dominating. And it was so unapologetic. It wasn't anything she had to say. It was like, 'I'm about to take back what's mine.' I needed that at that moment. It fed me."

It wasn't just women who were taking cues from the Williams sisters. An aspiring young race-car driver named Lewis Hamilton tuned in to Venus' and Serena's matches from a public housing complex north of London. "They were the two most inspiring sports figures for me," Hamilton told TIME. "Especially growing up in my sport, where I'm the only person of color, seeing these two prominent figures, also the only people of color, really gave me a lot of confidence that I can do something similar. It's not impossible." Hamilton, winner of seven Formula One titles—tied for the most in history—has also bonded with Serena. She carries a small microphone in her handbag when they go out, for impromptu karaoke.

Over a quarter-century on tour, Williams has had her share of downturns. She suffered knee, ankle, shoulder, foot, hamstring, and Achilles injuries. She grieved the death of older sister Yetunde Price, who was killed in a 2003 shooting, in a case of mistaken identity. She was vilified at the 2009 U.S. Open for threatening a lineswoman after a foot-fault call. Williams apologized. And then she won two more Slams the next year.

In February 2011, Williams was supposed to fly from Los Angeles to New York City before heading to London. She canceled plans at the last minute. That night, she checked into a hospital with breathing difficulties: She suffered a pulmonary embolism and had blood clotting in her lungs. If she had been stuck on a cross-country flight, Williams believes she more than likely would have died. She thought she'd never play tennis again. Ten more Grand Slams followed.

***Below:** Williams celebrating her first major singles win at the 1999 U.S. Open. **Below right:** Powering a serve against fellow American Nicole Gibbs at the 2017 Australian Open.*

When Williams found out she was pregnant right before the 2017 Australian Open, she played on with little hesitation. "Athletes understand their bodies a million times better than the rest of us," said her husband Alexis Ohanian, the venture-capital investor who co-founded Reddit. "Even though the doctor was like, 'You've got to take it easy, 100° heat, yadda, yadda, yadda,' Serena said, 'I got this.' As long as she was confident, I was confident." Serena told her husband that she didn't drop a set the entire tournament because she knew it was best to get off the court quickly, for the baby's sake. The victory broke Steffi Graf's Open Era record for major titles.

Allyson Felix was among those watching. The Olympic track-and-field gold medalist discovered she was pregnant the next year, in 2018; she continued training and competing. Like Williams, Felix had a life-threatening delivery of her daughter after developing preeclampsia. Felix watched as Williams grinded her way back, ascending to the Wimbledon and U.S. Open finals in the year after Olympia was born. Felix charted a similar path. At the Tokyo Olympics, at 35, Felix won bronze in the 400-meter and a relay gold to become the most decorated female Olympic track-and-field athlete in history, and pass Carl Lewis for the most Olympic track-and-field medals won by an American. "I was heavily influenced by her experience and the comeback," says Felix. "Here's the ultimate example that it can be done."

As her career extended, Williams publicly embraced causes she had long valued privately. In 2015, she again played at Indian Wells, the prominent Southern California tournament she had boycotted since 2001 after feeling

an undercurrent of racist jeering. (Fans were angry that Venus pulled out of a semifinal against Serena with an injury; they were convinced that Richard had engineered that outcome.) As part of her return, Williams helped raise money for the Equal Justice Initiative, a nonprofit dedicated to racial justice and fighting mass incarceration. "Serena's not just taking punches, she punches back," said Black Lives Matter co-founder Alicia Garza. "She's showing us that it's important to belong to yourself. And ultimately, that is a motto that I hold, and I know that's one that she lives."

Rowland got emotional when asked to try to describe her friend's influence on the world. "For a young Black girl, to have survived the spaces where she wasn't welcomed, she stood with pride," said Rowland. "She represented for all of us, when we couldn't do it. She made it OK. Claim your space. Even when they're calling you words you'd never answer to. You can't hear it. Don't hear it. I'm sure that was a very scary place to be. But to do it, and you're the first to do it, the way you do it, with our own unique way, with style and with grace and unapologetic of your greatness," Rowland said, choking back tears. "That took some … f-cking guts."

It's been too long a road for Williams to shy away from what she's done. She owns it. Deservedly. Unapologetically. And it's rooted in what she knows she and her sister have meant to the sport that they both shaped and were shaped by. "We changed the game of tennis," Williams says. "We changed how people play, period. People never attacked. People never took balls early. People never served like this. People never had to play so hard to beat two Black girls from Compton."

Off the court, she's helped transform beauty standards—often in the face of crass scrutiny and racist tropes. "A lot of people feel they're not pretty or they're not cute enough because their skin is dark," she says. But she insists she never felt that way, despite all the shots directed her way. "I think people could feel my confidence, because I was always told, 'You look great. Be Black and be proud.'" There were too few prominent examples in mainstream sports before Venus and Serena—and few who won so regularly and defiantly. "Giving them that confidence, that motivation, is something that has literally never been done," says Williams. "You don't let the world decide beauty. And me being thicker or whatever, I mean, curves are popular now. Butts are popular. I'm trying to lose mine, and people are trying to get mine."

Knowing insight delivered in a self-deprecating package is a Williams signature. But press a little and she states plainly what she believes her legacy is. "Confidence and self-belief," Williams said. "And teaching other Black kids, in particular Black girls, they can do it too." She listed the top Black players on the pro tour—like Osaka

and Gauff and Stephens—who represent the emergent generation. "No one has ever been able to tell such an inspiring, authentic story," she said. "You live through my mistakes. You live through my ups, you live through my downs. The surgeries and the comebacks. And it's also a tale of never letting anyone write your story. A lot of people can relate to that. Always be authentically you. Own who you are. And love you. It's a big tale of self-love."

She laughed. In her final days as a pro tennis player, she also shed some tears. She bawled while working on her 2022 *Vogue* essay announcing her imminent farewell. Walking away from the game you've spent your life mastering is complicated. And it's not to say she won't decide to pick up a racket again one day. But her next chapter isn't about finding 5 o'clock somewhere. Serena Ventures has invested in more than a dozen companies now worth more than $1 billion, including MasterClass, Impossible Foods, and Tonal. Nearly 80% of the companies in the firm's portfolio were founded by women or people of color. "It's not that I've lost my passion for tennis," she says. "I just get more love and more joy out of what I do in the VC space."

But expanding her family was paramount for hers. "I can't imagine my life without my sisters," Williams said. Coming from a big family, and coming from five, there's nothing better."

As Williams prepped for the 2022 U.S. Open, she felt her game finally coming along after a long layoff. Before Wimbledon, where she lost in the first round, Williams hadn't played in a year because of a hamstring injury. The progress was bittersweet. "I can see my improvement, and I'm like, Dang, I'll be good in January," she said. But would she second-guess retirement when the 2023 Australian Open came along? "I'm already thinking that," Williams said, "I'm not doing that," she insisted.

And she didn't. But she had one final message: "Thank you so much," she told TIME. "I am so overwhelmed. It's just been an incredible, incredible ride, and I'm so happy that you guys are on it with me." Williams stopped, noded, and brought her hands together, in the blessed position. "And I love you." *—with reporting by Mariah Espada and Julia Zorthian*

***Left:** Williams with her daughter Alexis Olympia after winning the 2020 Auckland Classic women's singles title. **Above:** Waving to fans after losing to Australia's Ajla Tomljanovic at the 2022 U.S. Open, her final professional match.*

PEACE

NADIA MURAD

Protecting Survivors

BY ASTHA RAJVANSHI

***Left:** Murad posing for a photo at the Palais Brongniart during the 2022 Paris Peace Forum.*
***Above:** Accepting The Torch of Freedom award at the* Forbes *30/50 Summit 2024 in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.*

NADIA MURAD DREAMED OF RUNNING HER OWN beauty salon in Kojo, a small farming village in northern Iraq. "In my imagination, the salon was a safe space where women and girls could share ideas, learn things, and have something for themselves," she told TIME in 2024.

That dream was torn away when Islamic State fighters invaded her village in 2014, intent on destroying a Yazidi community they called infidels. Her mother, siblings, relatives, and friends were killed. Murad, then 21, was one of nearly 6,000 Yazidi women and children held captive and subjected to rape for nearly three months. She eventually escaped and resettled in Germany in 2015.

Today, the 31-year-old channels that trauma into advocacy for survivors of genocide and sexual violence. "When you survive a war and know so many people who didn't make it, you feel responsible to do something for them," she said.

As president and chairwoman of the nonprofit Nadia's Initiative, Murad lobbies governments and international organizations on behalf of those in crisis, with a focus on policy reform and resources for community rebuilding. Her efforts have resonated with the world: Her 2017 memoir, *The Last Girl: My Story of Captivity, and My Fight Against the Islamic State*, became a *New York Times* bestseller, and in 2018 she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Murad, who often meets fellow survivors, said they all share a desire for "justice, and to see an end to this systematic use of violence against women and girls."

In December 2023, she emerged as lead plaintiff in a lawsuit filed with some 400 Yazidi Americans against Lafarge, the French cement conglomerate that in 2022 pleaded guilty to paying millions to ISIS for a factory in Syria. Human-rights attorney Amal Clooney, a longtime associate and advocate for Murad, filed the suit under civil provisions of the Anti-Terrorism Act. "Companies who support ISIS or other like-minded groups must be held accountable," said Murad.

Alongside her advocacy, in 2024, Murad was the first in her family to graduate from college, with a sociology degree from American University. In 2023, she told TIME she was looking forward to small joys like "more hair and makeup," after graudation. "I know I wasn't able to open my salon, but I'm proud to say that at least I can help other women and girls in Iraq do it."

YAEL ADMI & REEM HAJAJREH

Calling for Peace

BY YASMEEN SERHAN

ON OCTOBER 4, 2023, SOME 1,500 ISRAELI AND Palestinian women descended on Jerusalem and the shores of the Dead Sea. Wielding blue and yellow flags representing two different grassroots peace organizations, they gathered to demand an end to the "cycle of bloodshed" consuming their communities and for their respective leaders to return to the negotiating table to secure a nonviolent resolution to their decades-long conflict. "This is a historic partnership of two women's movements," said Yael Admi, a co-founder and leader of the Israeli movement Women Wage Peace. She referred to the alliance with the Palestinian organization Women of the Sun, whose founder and director Reem Hajajreh added, "We started out as a movement with a few lone women and now we are thousands. We no longer take the back seat."

It was a jubilant affair, the event organizers say, with attendees brimming with optimism over what both groups of women could achieve. But the joy didn't last long. Just three days later, Hamas militants unleashed their October 7 massacre, killing some 1,200 people in Israel. Three members of Women Wage Peace, including co-founder Vivian Silver, were killed that day.

Hajajreh said the status quo in the West Bank and Gaza had long been untenable. But since October 7, the situation has become markedly worse in both the West Bank, where settler violence has surged, and Gaza, where Israel's retaliatory strikes and invasion have killed more than 35,000 people. At the start of the war, Women of the Sun counted some 2,500 members in the West Bank, where it is headquartered, and roughly 300 members in Gaza, dozens of whom have been killed.

What would peace look like? The two-state solution envisioned by the 1993 Oslo Accords was in tatters long before October 7. Since then, polls have shown that majorities in both communities no longer consider it feasible, let alone desirable. Most outside observers share their pessimism.

While neither Women Wage Peace nor Women of the Sun advocates a particular political solution, both organizations believe that a mutually agreed-upon, nonviolent resolution is vital—and that its absence means Israeli and Palestinian women and their children will continue to pay the price. "We said all the time that we have to solve this conflict as soon as possible because it's a ticking bomb—it will kill all of us," Admi told TIME. "Now when you see the crisis, this terrible war, how can we suffer it and continue on this path?"

Admi and Hajajreh said they have no intention of letting despair stymie their efforts—perhaps because it was despair that brought them to this work in the first place. For Admi, the death of her eldest brother Ishai Ron in 1969 during fighting between Egypt and Israel, when she was just 12 years old, spurred a lifetime of peace activism. It ultimately inspired her to co-found Women Wage Peace in 2014, after another "horrible cycle of war" in Gaza. Now in its 10th year, the group claims some 50,000 members across the country who are committed to its nonpartisan call for peace.

Hajajreh turned to activism out of fear that her children, growing up under the shadow of Israel's punishing military occupation in the West Bank, could end up being imprisoned, wounded, or worse. In founding Women of the Sun in 2021, she hoped to empower Palestinian women—who remain largely absent from the male-dominated public arena—to have greater political awareness. "We believe women are strong and when you put [a woman] in the right place and you educate her and work on it, she will be powerful."

While each organization focuses on its respective community, they also dedicate time to working with each other—a prerequisite, as they see it, for asking their leaders to do the same. Their principal achievement is the Mothers' Call, a joint declaration in 2022 setting out their shared desire for a peaceful resolution. Underpinning the call is a belief that women's participation can only strengthen efforts—a credo supported by research in former conflict zones that shows that peace negotiations involving women tend to be stronger and more durable.

Despite—or perhaps because of—the war, their cause is gaining momentum. In December 2023, the two organizations were jointly nominated for the 2024 Nobel Peace Prize. A month later, they were invited by a French women's movement to speak at the French Parliament, where they urged the world to encourage Israeli and Palestinian leaders to return "to a path of negotiations and political agreements—immediately."

"In a very tragic way we became very famous because these days people are looking for hope," Admi said. Her wish is that this crisis will open up a new path to peace. "I'm very optimistic because I feel these awful days are a great opportunity for all of us," she said. "We just have to do everything to not miss it."

Admi (left) and Hajajreh attend the 2024 TIME Women of the Year Gala in West Hollywood, California.

YULIA NAVALNAYA

Leading the Russian Opposition

BY SIMON SHUSTER

Left: *Navalnaya posing for cameras after voting in Russian elections in Berlin, Germany, in 2024.* ***Above:*** *Navalnaya recieves the Media Freedom Prize at the Ludwig Erhard Summit in Gmund at Lake Tegernsee, southern Germany.*

IN RUSSIAN CUSTOM, THE SOUL OF THE DEAD IS believed to remain on earth for 40 days, finishing its business among the living before it moves on to the afterlife. Surviving friends and relatives often spend this period in mourning and reflection. But the loved ones of Alexei Navalny, Russia's leading dissident, did not have much freedom to abide by this custom after he died in an Arctic prison camp on February 16, 2024.

For them, and especially for his wife, Yulia Navalnaya, the days and weeks that followed his death rushed by in a blur of studio lights, airport terminals, hotel rooms, and video calls. Somewhere in that time, between consoling their two children and being consoled by them, she met with President Joe Biden in San Francisco and addressed the European parliament in Strasbourg. She accused Vladimir Putin of killing her husband, and she implored the Russian people to help her get revenge. Along the way, to the surprise of many of her husband's followers, Navalnaya took on a role she had never occupied before — no longer the first lady of the Russian opposition, but now its figurehead.

It was in this new role that she agreed in early April 2024 to an interview with TIME, a little more than 40 days after her husband was killed. The location took some time to figure out. Her family's exile from Russia has forced her to move around in recent years. But we agreed to meet in Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania, where her husband's activist organization has its base of operations. At the appointed time, Navalnaya arrived in the company of a bodyguard, striding through the parking lot in a stark black suit and patent-leather heels.

Some of her husband's friends and allies had warned me that she could come off as distant and aloof. One of them unkindly referred to her as a "snow queen." But as we sat down to talk over coffee, her memories of Navalny often made her smile as she recalled his sense of humor, the lightness with which he faced the darkest moments in his life. Not once in those two hours did her voice catch in her throat, and only a few times did she allow the pain of the previous weeks to show in her eyes. "There has been so little time to think, to plan, to process," she admitted. "But we have to keep working, to keep moving forward."

For her husband's followers in Russia, the way forward looks far from clear with him gone. It took well over a decade of campaigning and activism for Navalny to earn his place within the opposition movement, as the only dissident to pose a genuine threat to Putin's rule. Even after his imprisonment in 2021, Navalny continued to run his revolutionary network, to campaign against corruption and to spread his promise that Russia would one day become a normal European democracy. That hope dimmed after Navalny's death, and for many it was extinguished.

His wife could see that in the messages she received after his death. "I saw how many people feel this loss very, very deeply," Navalnaya said. "And I really wanted to support these people, to give them some kind of hope." Her best chance of doing that, she said, was to step into his role and continue his struggle. So that is what she decided to do. In a video address three days after his death, she fought back tears as she told the people of Russia: "Share my rage—the rage, anger, and hatred toward those who dared to kill our future."

Many assumed that this decision had been Navalny's wish. But his wife said they had never talked about it. There was no succession plan, not even after Navalny was nearly poisoned to death in 2020. "It was not discussed," she said in our interview. His allies always clung to their faith that, sooner or later, Navalny would outlive the regime and emerge from the prison to replace it.

That vision of Russia's future died with Navalny, and his team has now set out to imagine a new one. In the weeks that followed his death, TIME interviewed over a dozen of his friends, allies, critics, and fellow dissidents, traveling to find them in four of the countries where they have gone to escape Russia's system of repression. Many of them described feeling paralyzed by grief and despair in Navalny's absence. Most agreed that his wife stands the best chance of succeeding him and carrying his banner. But some wondered what she could achieve from exile, cut off from her supporters, with little if any space to operate in Russia itself.

The main risk, one of them told me, was that Navalnaya turns into what Russians sometimes call a "parquet politician"—attending summits and ceremonies in Western capitals, accepting prizes for her courage and calling for change, all while the Kremlin continues to dismiss her as a demagogue in exile, detached from the lives of the people she intends to save. In our interview, Navalnaya acknowledged this risk. At times it seemed to worry her more than my questions about the physical danger she faces in challenging Putin so openly.

Her core mission, she said, is to remain in contact with her supporters inside Russia, even though she cannot see or touch them. "Most of all, I want the Kremlin and its officials to understand: If they killed Alexei, then I will step up. If they do something to me, another person will come," she said. "There are many, many people who are against the ruling authorities in Russia, against the regime, and I don't doubt that even if they kill a great many of these people, more will appear to take their place."

Mourners offer candles and flowers during a torchlight procession honoring the late Alexei Navalny in Rome, Italy, in February 2024.

JAHA DUKUREH

Protecting Women

BY ANGELA HAUPT

IN 2015, JAHA DUKUREH'S NATIVE GAMBIA banned female genital mutilation (FGM)—a milestone for the West African country that had long allowed partial or total removal of female genitalia for nonmedical reasons. Dukureh played a key role in advocating for that legislation through Safe Hands for Girls, the nonprofit she founded that aims to end FGM, as well as child marriage.

But in March 2024, Gambian lawmakers voted to advance a bill that would reverse the ban. The subsequent months have been "the worst time," Dukureh told TIME in May. The cause is personal to her: She experienced FGM—a cultural practice that can lead to long-term health consequences, including infertility, urinary problems, and posttraumatic stress disorder—when she was 1 week old. Her half-sister died of complications from it. "It was important to lead an organization that was by people like us, who have lived experience and know how to tackle these issues in a respectful manner," she said.

Dukureh and her colleagues fought the potential reversal—which would be the first in the world—by protesting, promoting dialogue with community members and religious leaders, striving to better understand where they're coming from, and educating them. "They're denying a lot of the pain that women and girls are going through, and just calling it Western influence," she said. In July 2024, the Gambain parliament voted to uphold the ban.

Dukureh's own family members don't always understand her mission. "I can't tell you the amount of times in a day that I hear that I'm going to hell," she said. "We're up against our religious leaders, who say that we're evil."

That doesn't sway her from her efforts. She feels it's part of her destiny—and feared that a reversal in Gambia could encourage other countries to roll back laws that protect women. "It's important for people to understand that you don't have to go through FGM to know what we are dealing with," she says. "This is a battle of women around the world—because you may not sound like me, you may not look like me, but what they are trying to do to our bodies is the same everywhere."

Dukureh speaks at Equality Now's 2023 Make Equality Reality Gala in New York City.

RUTH GOTTESMAN

Providing Debt-Free Doctors

BY BELINDA LUSCOMBE

IT'S AN UNCOMFORTABLE TRUTH THAT THE U.S., the richest nation in the world, does not have a particularly healthy population. This is partly because of a shortage of physicians, especially family doctors. Prospective medical students who do the math often find that the salaries they will earn are not high enough to pay back their medical school debt, unless they go into a lucrative specialty. The Association of American Medical Colleges forecasts that the U.S. will have a shortfall of 124,000 physicians by 2034, more than a third of them primary-care providers.

Ruth Gottesman, who is in her 90s, came up with a simple but stunning way to address this problem: In Februrary 2024, she gave $1 billion to the Albert Einstein College of Medicine to ensure that no student there will ever have to pay tuition. Over the years, this could lead to thousands of new medical professionals.

Einstein is in the Bronx, where more than a quarter of the population live in poverty. All told, it costs about $100,000 a year to attend the school. Gottesman, who was a professor at the school and is now chair of its board of trustees, inherited a trove of Berkshire Hathaway stock when her husband David died in 2022. Her hope, she told TIME, is that her gift "will open it up for many other students whose economic status is such that they wouldn't even think about going to medical school."

Gottesmann attends the 2016 Spirit of Achievement Luncheon in Manhattan, where she recieved the Lizette H. Sarnoff Award for Volunteer Service.

OLIVIA MUNN

Raising Breast-Cancer Awareness

BY ALICE PARK

THE NIGHT BEFORE SHE REVEALED ON SOCIAL media that she had breast cancer, actor Olivia Munn had a "full-blown panic attack," she told TIME in May 2024. She wrestled with wanting to be strong and hopeful, yet realistic about the challenges of having cancer: the difficult treatments and the sobering realities of how it would impact her future. So she decided to give some actionable advice.

She wrote an Instagram post urging women to use the Breast Cancer Risk Assessment Tool, a free online test that women can take in about five minutes to determine if they are at higher risk of developing breast cancer. "It was my No. 1 goal to tell other women that this tool exists," said Munn. Her doctor had used it to learn that Munn was at higher risk, even though she had had a few years of clear mammograms, no symptoms, and none of the major breast-cancer mutations in the BRCA gene. The quiz asks about family history of breast cancer, when women started their periods, and a few other questions—and if it reveals a higher risk, it guides women to get additional testing, which is what Munn did.

An MRI revealed tumors the mammograms had missed, and biopsies showed they were cancerous. Further testing showed Munn had an aggressive, fast-growing cancer, and that some tumors were close to her lymph nodes; if they moved there, they could spread to other parts of her body.

Munn's post led to a surge in visits to the Breast Cancer Risk Assessment Tool site, says a spokesperson for the National Cancer Institute, which operates the tool. "Seeing the conversation around this pick up gave me so much peace," said Munn. "I wanted to help as many people as possible prevent their cancer from going to the next level."

Because of her early diagnosis, Munn was able to choose between chemotherapy and radiation, or hormone-based treatments. She chose the latter and also decided to undergo a double mastectomy to reduce her risk of recurrence. "Right now I'm doing good," said Munn, whose son Malcolm is 2 years old. "I'm exhausted at times, but I get to be Malcolm's mom every day. The fact that I'm here—my spirits are high, and I remain extremely grateful."

Munn atttends the 2024 Vanity Fair *Oscar Party in Beverly Hills, California.*

JAMIE SELTZER

Advocating for Postviral Patients

BY JAMIE DUCHARME

FOR YEARS, MEDICAL SCHOOLS IN THE UNITED states barely taught their students about myalgic encephalomyelitis/chronic fatigue syndrome (ME/CFS), a chronic condition that affects up to 2.5 million people in the U.S., which can develop after routine viral illnesses and causes debilitating exhaustion. Jaime Seltzer—a trained scientist who developed ME/CFS in 2014 and now works as the scientific director for the advocacy group #MEAction—is working to change that.

Through #MEAction, Seltzer is helping to lead a major campaign to improve ME/CFS education, diagnosis, and treatment. Thanks to Seltzer's efforts, staff at big-name institutions including Emory, Brown, and Georgetown are working with #MEAction to improve education programs and treatment plans related to ME/CFS. Those efforts build on a partnership Seltzer made in 2023 with the Mayo Clinic, through which she helped revamp the health system's public-facing ME/CFS fact sheet and designed an algorithm to help doctors better diagnose and treat patients.

In all of these efforts, Seltzer says, her overriding goal is ensuring that patients' voices are heard at all levels of the medical system, from academic research all the way to primary-care doctors' offices. "My science background and my almost decade in advocacy are the machinery that I use to run," she told TIME. "But the fuel that runs the machine is my devotion and my love for my community."

Seltzer poses for a photo in her Los Altos Hills, California, home in 2019.

IGA SWIATEK

Playing the Mental Game

BY SEAN GREGORY

WHEN IGA SWIATEK, THE WORLD'S TOP-RANKED women's tennis player in 2024, travels to tournaments around the globe, her bag is filled with the usual accoutrements of superstars in her sport: racket, wardrobe, Legos. OK, Swiatek is likely the only five-time major winner toting around tiny plastic bricks. During the pandemic, Swiatek began toying with Legos; she finds the process of building with them relaxing.

Her habit isn't kid's play. Swiatek, the Poland native who has, as of July 2024, held the No. 1 ranking for more than two years, has expertly approached tennis from all angles, combining psychological training—her shrink introduced her to Legos—biomechanical expertise, and a fierce forehand to ascend to the top of her game. Swiatek earned a pair of Grand Slam titles—the French Open and U.S. Open—in 2022, and two more French Open titles in 2023 and 2024, at one point winning an incredible 37 consecutive matches over a 135-day stretch from mid-February through early July 2022. At the same time, Swiatek has found her voice off the court, emerging as an advocate for mental health and a voice for Ukrainian players on tour, who are competing while their homeland remains under Russian siege.

"She's a leader that doesn't yell at the top of a mountain," says 18-time Grand Slam winner Chris Evert. "She's more soft-spoken. Yet when Iga speaks, people will listen."

With Serena Williams having retired from tennis, the sport is searching for its next generational star. Swiatek has won three straight French Opens, staking her claim as the player to reckon with this decade. "You can't find anyone who moves better, who has a better forehand, and who's been mentally tougher…than Iga," tennis broadcaster Pam Shriver, a former tour player, told TIME in April 2023. "She's a little bit of a throwback, old-school No. 1 player."

In October 2021, in honor of World Mental Health Day, Swiatek announced she'd donate $50,000 of her third-round prize money at the Indian Wells tournament to mental-health charities in Poland. She made a similar donation—more than $56,000—at a 2022 tournament in the Czech Republic. "I realized how easier our lives could be if we work a little bit on ourselves," she says.

Swiatek still wears a ribbon on her cap supporting Ukraine, which shares a border with Poland. Other players stopped wearing them last year. "I didn't really get that," says Swiatek. "The memory of our society is short sometimes." In July 2022 Swiatek organized a charity match for Ukraine in Krakow: The event raised some $500,000, which was distributed to three nonprofits providing aid in Ukraine.

Swiatek in action against Kazakhstan's Yulia Putintseva at the 2024 Wimbledon Championships in London.

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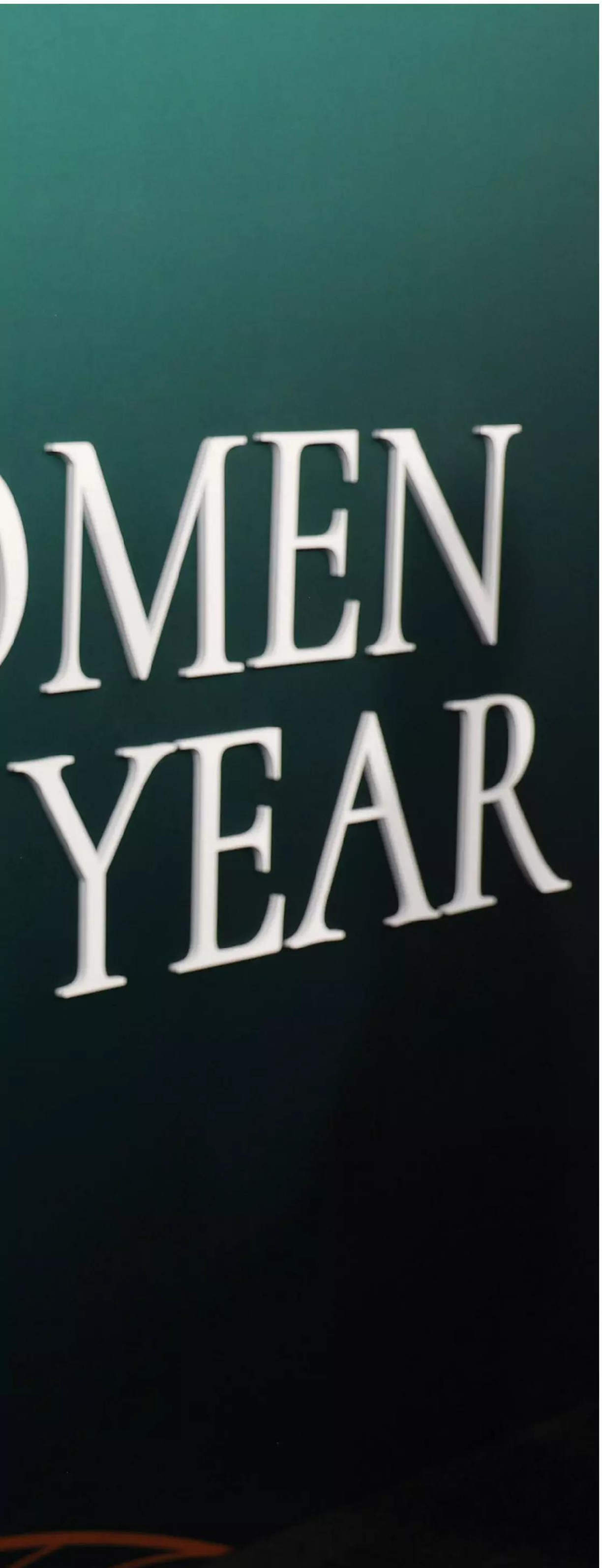

MARLENA FEJZO

Researching Hyperemesis Gravidarum

BY JAMIE DUCHARME

GENETICIST MARLENA FEJZO HAD A DIFFICULT start to her first pregnancy. She suffered from nausea and vomiting, as roughly 70% of pregnant people do, but pushed through until the symptoms lessened with time.

Her second pregnancy, in 1999, was another story. For weeks, all Fejzo could do was lie flat on her back, since even rolling to her side triggered debilitating nausea. Eating or drinking was out of the question, forcing her to get a home IV for nourishment. "Every second," she said, "was torture."

Fejzo, a clinical assistant professor at the University of Southern California's Keck School of Medicine, had something more serious than typical morning sickness. She was ultimately diagnosed with hyperemesis gravidarum (HG), a condition that leads to extreme nausea and vomiting in 1% to 3% of pregnancies.

But even as her doctor diagnosed her, he downplayed the situation, suggesting that many women with HG exaggerate their symptoms for sympathy. Fejzo knew he was wrong; the idea of making up such misery was ludicrous. But she "didn't have the energy to fight." By that point, she was bedbound and losing weight at an alarming rate.

Fejzo's physician eventually ordered a feeding tube, at around 11 weeks of pregnancy, but it wasn't enough. Fejzo had become so frail that she lost her fetus just a few weeks later. "It was just too late," she told TIME in 2024.

Haunted by her doctor's dismissal and the limits of his care, Fejzo tried to learn whatever she could about HG while she recovered. That turned out to be not much at all—the condition was barely studied at the time. (Many would only learn about HG when British royal Kate Middleton was hospitalized with it during her pregnancies.) "There was so little known," Fejzo said, but she had a hunch "there was something biological going on." She vowed to be the one to find out what it was, both for her own sake and that of her future children, twin daughters who were later born via surrogate. "I didn't want my daughters to have to go through that," she said. "Or anybody else."

Fejzo was uniquely well suited to the task. She'd been interested in women's health since her Ph.D. training in genetics at Harvard University, when she discovered two genes linked to developing potentially painful uterine growths known as fibroids. She'd gone on to research breast cancer at the University of California, San Francisco, and multiple sclerosis at the University of California, Los Angeles. Motivated by her "horrible experience" and the memory of being blamed for it, she turned her scientific expertise toward her own condition.

She began by setting up an online survey to learn more about the experiences of other people who'd had HG, the results of which suggested the condition ran in families—many sufferers said their mothers or sisters had also lived through it. Even more painstakingly, Fejzo spent a decade calling people who had suffered through HG, one by one, to ask for saliva samples she could use in genetic studies down the line. She collected plenty of samples, but at first struggled to persuade funders to pay for costly genetic research.

Then, in 2010, she took a 23andMe DNA test that changed everything. When Fejzo saw the survey 23andMe sends to its customers to learn more about how their genes relate to their health, it sparked an idea. She persuaded the company to include questions about HG in its survey, and by 2016 she had access to genetic data and survey responses from about 50,000 people.

By analyzing that trove of data, Fejzo was able to zero in on two genes of interest. One, in particular, seemed promising: It codes for the hormone GDF15, which is linked to appetite suppression and vomiting—and which the body produces in earnest during pregnancy. In 2018, she published a paper in *Nature Communications* suggesting that a variant of that gene could predispose people to HG. She later bolstered that finding, discovering a rare genetic mutation that seemed to be even more strongly linked to developing HG.

Spurred by those discoveries, Fejzo quit her position in a UCLA cancer laboratory in 2020 to focus on researching HG. It wasn't difficult to leave, she said. "There's tons of people working on cancer, and I'm one of the only people working on hyperemesis. If I stopped working on it, the road would have ended." She wasn't willing to let that happen.

In 2023, more than two decades after her harrowing experience with HG, Fejzo had another breakthrough. In a paper published in *Nature*, she reported that people with HG tend to have high blood levels of GDF15 during pregnancy, yet produce lower-than-average amounts of GDF15 prior to pregnancy. When GDF15 levels naturally rise after conception, the shock to the system results in HG's relentless nausea and vomiting.

That finding opens up promising avenues for treatment. Doctors could lower GDF15 levels during pregnancy. Or, if they could gradually supplement levels of the hormone in people who are not yet pregnant but deemed high-risk based on personal or family history of HG, they could feasibly smooth the transition and avoid debilitating symptoms. Fejzo is now applying for funding for a clinical trial to test whether the drug metformin—which is approved to treat Type 2 diabetes but is used off-label for numerous purposes and has been shown to raise GDF15 levels—works as a preventive therapy.

It may take years to find out whether that approach works, but if it does, Fejzo will be able to act quickly. In addition to serving on the board of the Hyperemesis Education & Research Foundation, Fejzo is the chief scientific officer at a new women's health company, Harmonia Healthcare, which opened an HG-focused treatment center in New Jersey in May 2024 and plans to open another in New York City later in the year. "I've been trying for so long to put an end to this," Fejzo said, "and I think we're finally close."

***Page 76 and Below:** Fejzo attends the 2024 TIME Women of the Year Gala in West Hollywood, California.*

AKIKO IWASAKI

Creating a Better Booster

BY JAMIE DUCHARME

THE CURRENT COVID-19 VACCINES ARE incredibly good at keeping people who catch the virus from getting very sick or dying, but they cannot block infections. That's where Akiko Iwasaki, professor of immunobiology at the Yale School of Medicine, comes in.

Building on their years of research on other viruses, Iwasaki and her colleagues are working on a new approach to COVID-19 vaccination: administering booster doses via the nose. The idea, Iwasaki says, is to help the body build up additional protection where it's needed most, blanketing the nose—through which the virus often gets in—with its own defense system. In 2021, she co-founded a company, Xanadu Bio, that is trying to bring nasal vaccines for COVID-19, the flu, and RSV to market.

That work dovetails with Iwasaki's other focus: postinfectious illnesses like Long COVID, which she began researching during the pandemic and now studies as the director of Yale's Center for Infection and Immunity. If nasal vaccines help fewer people get infected by the virus that causes COVID-19, she says, fewer people will develop Long COVID.

That's important, since there's no known cure for the chronic condition—although Iwasaki is working on that too. She's led studies on how COVID-19 vaccines and antivirals affect Long COVID symptoms, as well as on the underlying biology of the disease, and says her focus will remain there moving forward. "It's not going to be solved overnight," she says, "but I'm committed to doing it."

Iwasaki attends the 2024 TIME100 Gala in New York City.

CHIQUITA BROOKS-LASURE

Controlling Rx Drug Prices

BY ALICE PARK

AS HEAD OF THE AGENCY THAT INSURES 160 million people through Medicare and Medicaid, Chiquita Brooks-LaSure is well aware of the ripple effect that each decision she makes has on the U.S. health care system. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) has been both criticized—for its requirements for covering a new Alzheimer's drug—and lauded—for lowering drug prices—since 2023. Brooks-LaSure defends the decision to require Alzheimer's patients to join a registry in order to get reimbursed, saying that the process does not limit access to the drug and the information will be critical for determining long-term health outcomes.

CMS's role in reducing drug prices is a relatively new one for the agency, since prescription drugs were not a large part of costs when it was created in the 1960s. But Medicare and Medicaid coverage has always shaped the delivery of health care in America; the agency catalyzed the desegregation of hospitals across the country when it decided to withhold federal funding from any hospital that discriminated based on race. Today that legacy continues, most notably in drug pricing. Not only do private insurers often follow CMS's lead in how much to reimburse for treatments, but beginning in 2023, the Inflation Reduction Act gave CMS the ability to negotiate directly with drug makers to set prices that it reimburses.

First up was insulin, which CMS capped at $35 a month for its members beginning in July 2023; that prompted manufacturers including Eli Lilly, Novo Nordisk, and Sanofi to drop their prices as well. In August 2023, the agency announced the first 10 drugs to be negotiated in the program, which included medications for diabetes, stroke, and blood clots. And for the first time, Medicare also capped overall out-of-pocket spending on prescription drugs for members at $3,300 to $3,800 a year, dropping to $2,000 in 2025.

"When Medicare starts paying attention to something or setting rules, it changes the entire health system," says Brooks-LaSure. "I think we are at an inflection point on prescription drugs. There is a feeling that enough is enough, and that current pricing is not sustainable."

Brooks-LaSure speaks at the April 2022 American Hospital Association's annual membership meeting in Washington, D.C.

HALLE BERRY

Talking About Menopause

BY JAMIE DUCHARME

THE WORLD KNOWS HALLE BERRY AS A director and an Oscar-winning actor. But these days, she's equally likely to be on a movie set or on Capitol Hill, lobbying lawmakers for better menopause research and treatment.

When Berry entered menopause, she, like many women, realized she knew almost nothing about the life stage. Her doctors hadn't prepared her for life-disrupting symptoms including hot flashes, night sweats, and brain fog, which made her feel like her only option was to grit her teeth and suffer through. "Internally and socially, I had never felt better, more ready for the world, more empowered, more confident," Berry says. "I thought, 'This isn't the time to not have all the information about how to take care of myself.'"

She decided to do something about it, speaking out about her experience and shifting the focus of her wellness platform, Re-Spin, to center on menopause. She's since made multiple trips to Congress to meet with lawmakers including Washington Sen. Patty Murray, with whom she is working toward legislation that would expand federal investment in midlife-women's-health research, create a public awareness and education program focused on menopause, and provide grants for health care workers who want to expand their training.

Most of all, Berry says, her goal is to destigmatize this life stage. "When women are having babies, we have baby showers. Wouldn't it be amazing to have a celebration for entering into this time of your life," she says, instead of thinking "we have to be sent out to pasture because our lives are over and we're no longer valuable?"

Berry speaks at The Institute for Functional Medicine's 2024 Annual International Conference in Las Vegas, Nevada.

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SELENA GOMEZ

Leading a Mental Health-Focused Beauty Brand

BY ARMANI SYED

SELENA GOMEZ IS COMMITTED TO RARE BEAUTY, she said at the April 2024 TIME100 Summit in New York City. Gomez launched the vegan and cruelty-free makeup line in September 2020, and it has since amassed a valuation of $2 billion, a figure that led to reports of a potential sale in Rare Beauty's immediate future.

"I don't think I'm going anywhere. I am enjoying this a little too much," the actor and musician said, adding that Rare Beauty is her "pride and joy." Gomez was joined on the stage by Elyse Cohen, Vice President of Social Impact and Inclusion at Rare Beauty, for a conversation titled The Beauty of Impact, moderated by TIME senior editor Lucy Feldman.

"I didn't want to really enter the cosmetics world without a mission," Gomez said of her decision to launch Rare Beauty. First and foremost is the brand's focus on building a community to freely discuss mental health. "It was actually a dream that kind of happened within this brand, and on top of it we were able to make hopefully decent products."

Gomez is personally committed to furthering conversations around mental health, by talking about her own journey. The actor, who had an early entry into the entertainment industry when she was 7 years old, before becoming a household name starring in Disney Channel television series *Wizards of Waverly Place*, currently stars on the hit comedy crime television show *Only Murders in the Building*, which is in its fourth season. She also has a prolific career as a Grammy-nominated pop musician, with three studio albums to her name. In her 2020 documentary, *Selena Gomez: My Mind & Me*, she shared that she'd been diagnosed with bipolar disorder, a decision she said was "freeing."

"All these confusing things were happening," Gomez said at the summit. "Once I finally found the answer, it wasn't 'Oh, I have this problem.' It actually made me feel better to know and understand what was happening in my mind."

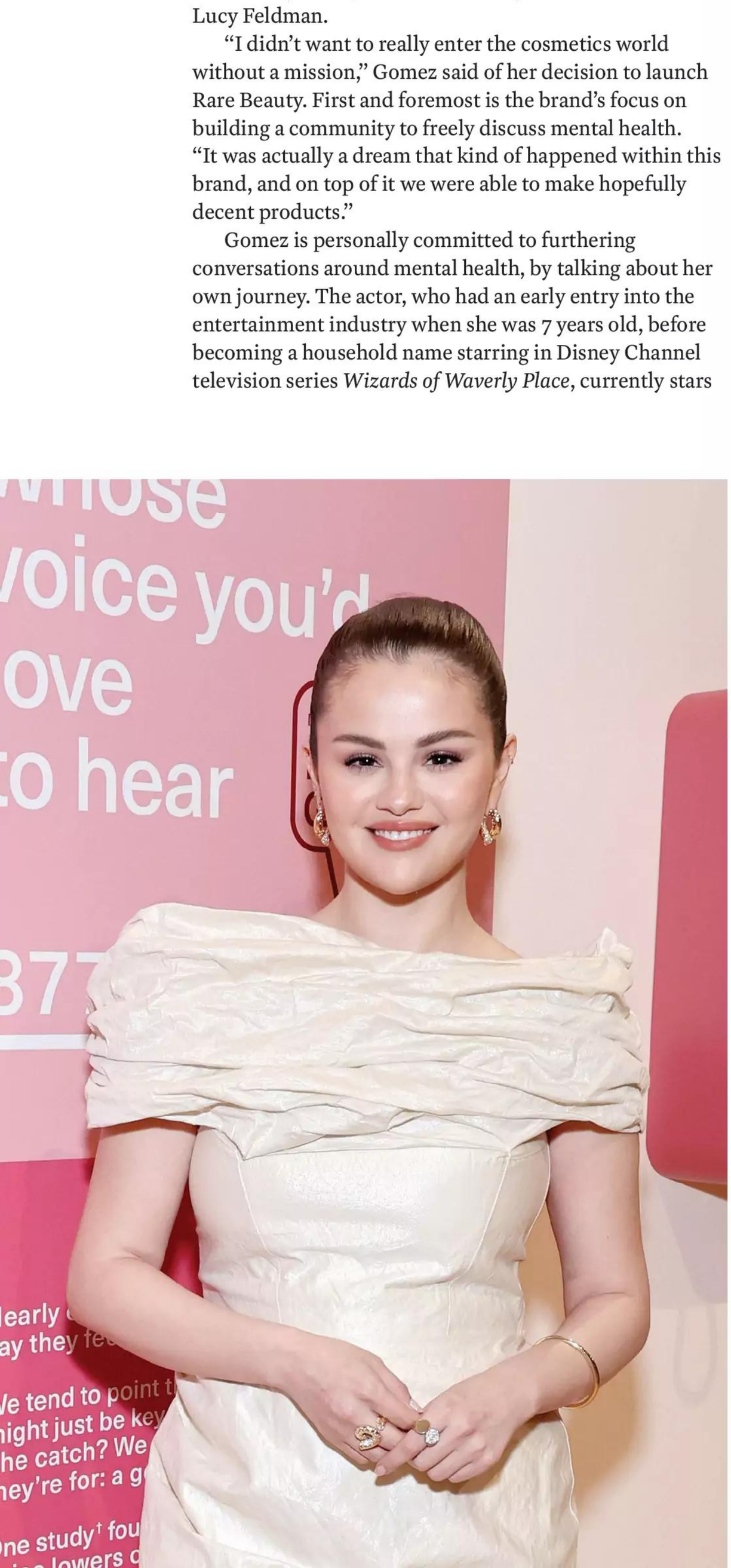
Gomez said the single most important thing she does for her own mental health is to seek out alone time. Cohen, who also serves as president of the Rare Impact Fund, the beauty brand's commitment to youth mental health awareness, said her mental health priorities are twofold: Her first is to surround herself with people who uplift her, she said. Her second is to find power in telling our own stories.

"Once you start to share a tiny bit, you just realize how much less alone you are and how so many of us are more alike than we are different," she said. Cohen added that the Rare Impact Fund has raised more than $13 million since its launch, which supports 26 organizations in supporting young people. Before a single product was sold, Gomez pledged that 1% of all sales, not profits, would go toward mental health action. Rare Beauty channels also drive its followers toward mindful resources, rather than just products.

"We have such an opportunity to bring the gift of someone like Selena, a new brand, and an issue that was coming to the headlines," Cohen said.

Gomez added that the community Rare Beauty has built is what sets the brand apart from its competitors: "That is what makes me happy every night when I go to sleep because it's mission driven."

During the conversation, Gomez also opened up about her relationship with social media: "I find it frustrating. Then I get a little mouthy and I want to defend the people I love." The most-followed woman on Instagram, with 425 million followers, Gomez has had her ups and downs with the platform. "I took four years off of Instagram, and I let my team post for me for those years. I felt like it was the most rewarding gift I gave myself," she said.



***Top left:** Gomez at the 2024 launch of Rare Beauty's Soft Pinch Tinted Lip Oil collection in New York City.*
***Left:** Attending Rare Beauty's 2024 Annual Mental Health Summit in New York City.*

MANDY COHEN

Leading the CDC

BY JAMIE DUCHARME

THE U.S.'S COVID-19 PUBLIC-HEALTH EMERGENCY officially ended on May 11, 2023. Almost exactly a month later, President Joe Biden announced that internal-medicine physician Dr. Mandy Cohen would take over as director of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), taking the reins at the world's most influential public-health agency at a pivotal moment in its history.

The CDC's reputation took a beating during the pandemic, as critics on both sides of the aisle took issue with its communication about and management of the virus. When Cohen took the agency's top spot, after previously leading North Carolina's department of health and human services, her first priority was improving the agency's communication to rebuild trust and authority. She's made it her mission to break down silos within the CDC's own walls and has committed to clearly and succinctly conveying information about COVID-19 and other health issues to the public.

The CDC has not always been popular under Cohen—there was significant outcry to the decision to strip down isolation guidance for people who have COVID-19—but she has not let the criticism stop her from doing ambitious work.

Cohen is now spearheading a new effort to collect real-time data from hospitals across the country, to get a better sense of the illnesses that are affecting people nationwide and pick up on and respond to "unusual patterns" before they get to a crisis point. "When you get sick, you don't walk into a public-health department," Cohen told TIME in May 2024. "You walk into an emergency room." And now, CDC will be able to see what happens when you do.

Cohen during a 2024 interview in Washington, D.C.

NEMONTE NENQUIMO

Listening to Mother Earth

BY SIMMONE SHAH

NEMONTE NENQUIMO BELIEVES THAT MOTHER Nature is sending us a message—we just need to listen.

"She's crying. She's shouting. She's screaming. She's saying that…when the tides are rising, the rivers are rising. There are droughts. And this is my language. This is my alarm to you."

Nenquimo, an Indigenous leader of the Waorani peoples in Ecuador and founder of the nonprofits Ceibo Alliance and Amazon Frontlines, has focused much of her activism on preserving the Amazon from deforestation and oil extraction.

The warning signs of the climate crisis are a reminder of our collective responsibility to the Earth, she said in her TIME Earth Awards acceptance speech in April 2024, after the honor was presented to her by Peter Seligmann, CEO of nonprofit Nia Tero and chairman of Conservation International.

"My people are listening so closely to Mother Earth, and they know that Mother Earth isn't asking that much from us," Nenquimo said. "She's not asking to be saved. She's asking something very simple. She's asking that we respect her."

In 2019, Nenquimo led a lawsuit against the Ecuadorian government that resulted in the protection of 500,000 acres of the Amazonian rainforest from oil drilling and set a legal precedent for Indigenous communities across the country.

She believes that meaningful action will require support from everyone—not just communities at the front line of the climate crisis. "What gives me hope is being here together with all of you, and knowing that we can fight together," she said. "I'm not asking you all to wait for Indigenous people to lead this fight against the climate crisis. What I'm asking is for all of us to join together and battle the climate crisis together. The water, the earth, the air needs our support."

Nenquimo speaks at the 2024 TIME Earth Awards Gala in New York City.

STELLA MCCARTNEY

Making Sustainable Fashion

BY NAINA BAJEKAL

STELLA MCCARTNEY DOESN'T WANT YOU TO FEEL bad. The British fashion designer understands it's easy to get overwhelmed by all the ways the products we eat, buy, and wear come with unintended consequences—for society, for animals, for the planet. And so even if she's talking about the harrowing conditions workers suffer in fast-fashion factories or the devastating climate impact of animal agriculture, she's eager to emphasize that the goal isn't guilt. It's hard work to be the best you can be, after all, especially when what many of us want is seemingly impossible: to live more sustainably without giving up the luxuries and conveniences of modern life. We want to look good, feel good, and still somehow do good.

And so McCartney is trying to make that a little easier. Creator of the first ever vegan "It bag"—the slouchy faux-leather Falabella tote with a sleek chain trim—McCartney has spent her career trying to show the world that ethical choices don't have to mean compromising on glamour. Since the launch of her namesake label in 2001, she has created luxury clothing that celebrates modern femininity—her brand is a closet staple for countless celebrities—while eschewing leather, feathers, and fur. She also made a name for herself as one of the cool girls of the noughties, out with Kate Moss, Madonna, and Gwyneth Paltrow. (A 2000 *Vogue* profile called her "a girl who loves to make a little trouble, get a rise, stir things up.")

Two decades on, she remains a fixture on the high-fashion circuit, making clothing that is known as much for its sharp tailoring, minimal lines, and bold aesthetics as it is for its eco credentials. She's also a pioneer, collaborating with startups on the cruelty-free, sustainable materials—like grape-based leather, forest-friendly rayon, and recycled cashmere—that made up 90% of her 2023 winter collection. "All I'm trying to show is that you don't need to sacrifice," she said when we meet in her London office in July 2023. "You're not being penalized for your choices."

McCartney had a running start: She's the daughter of two prominent animal-rights activists who wrote protest letters to companies involved in animal abuse, lobbied against fur, and published vegetarian cookbooks. They also happen to be music royalty: Beatles legend Paul McCartney and the American photographer Linda (who died in 1998), who built a home in the countryside but also took their kids on the road with their band, Wings. "One side was this farm life, and the other side was the stage, with glittery boots and glamour," McCartney recalled. "It was an early inspiration."

She has since established herself as a British fashion icon in her own right, designing the uniforms for Team GB Olympic athletes and Meghan Markle's wedding-reception dress. "It was impossible for fashion to think of luxury and sustainability in the same breath before Stella changed that," Anna Wintour, chief content officer of Condé Nast and global editorial director at *Vogue*, wrote over email.

McCartney's work increasingly extends beyond her own label: In the past few years, she has met world leaders at the G7 and the U.N. Climate Change Conference and co-founded the $200 million Collab SOS fund for climate solutions. As sustainability became a business imperative, her brand became more desirable. In 2018, she bought back the 50% stake that Kering had held for 17 years—only to team up the following year with Kering's chief rival, LVMH (Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton). There, she was appointed special adviser on sustainability to CEO Bernard Arnault, one of the world's richest men, who said in a statement that "a decisive factor was that she was the first to put sustainability and ethical issues on the front stage, very early on."

The minority stake provided both the freedom and the cash to continue innovations that might not turn a profit. Her namesake brand reported a loss of more than $40 million in 2021, the third consecutive year of a loss of more than $38 million, following the split from Kering and the business challenges of the pandemic. Now, as McCartney brings more eco-friendly materials into her own collections, she also collaborates with LVMH—Europe's largest company by market value—to encourage its other maisons (among them Loewe, Dior, and Givenchy) to do the same.

In an era when many make claims to sustainability, few have been doing it as well, as stylishly—or as long—as McCartney. "When I first started, I was definitely the eco weirdo in the room," she said. "But why would I compromise what I believe in morally to go into an industry I'm passionate about?"

McCartney attends the 2023 LVMH Prize Cocktail during Paris Fashion Week.

JANE FONDA

Taking Climate Action

BY STEPHANIE ZACHAREK

JANE FONDA, AT 86, IS SMALL-BONED AND elegant, her eyes like soft blue-gray flannel. Yet it's startling how much energy shoots through her via a simple handshake: If a woodland creature could shake your hand, it might feel like this, the will of an entire forest ecosystem pouring through one being. She's physically strong, sitting up straight and tall for more than an hour on a backless ottoman, perched before a cozy sitting-room fireplace in her Los Angeles town house. But the message telegraphed by her handshake is less a matter of muscle tone than of pure urgency. If you could put it into words, it would be this: There's not much time left.

Fonda has already lived many lives. The daughter of a much loved actor and a socialite, Henry Fonda and Frances Ford Seymour, she has built an astonishing acting career herself: In the space of just a few years, she shifted from the campy delights of *Barbarella* to career-defining performances in *Klute* and *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* Younger audiences know her from the *Book Club* movies and the hit TV series *Grace and Frankie*. And although it's now common for actors to support causes they care about, vocally and financially, Fonda is the OG actor-activist. In the early 1970s she supported Native American causes and spoke out on behalf of the Black Panthers. She's fought for civil rights and issues directly affecting women's welfare, though she may be best known for her anti-Vietnam War stance in the 1970s—in particular, a photograph of her perched on an anti-aircraft gun taken during a 1972 trip to Hanoi. Fonda has apologized repeatedly and profusely over the years for that photo, knowing how hurtful it was to GIs and veterans. She knows what it's like to be embattled, and to go to battle for principles she believes in. But in 2019 Fonda had a breakthrough that, as she describes it, was bigger than any revelation she's had in decades of both acting and activism.

She'd felt a growing sense of alarm a year earlier, during the 2018 California wildfires. "The skies here were orange-brown," she recalled. "I read that birds were dropping dead out of the sky over New Mexico and Arizona. They couldn't make their normal migratory journey over the coast because of the wildfires. So they were flying over the deserts, and they were dying of dehydration and hunger." Fonda spent her early years in the hills of California in the 1940s when there were no freeways and no smog. She remembers the sounds of meadowlarks, nightingales, mourning doves. "You don't hear them anymore. I went into a downward spiral. I realized, it's happening now. This isn't something in the future. I've marched, I've protested. But given my platform, I'm not doing what I can do. And this could be the end. I have to commit myself more."

***Above:** Fonda speaks at the 2024 Hollywood Climate Summit in Beverly Hills, California.*
***Right:** Arriving for the opening ceremony of the 2024 Cannes Film Festival in France.*

Fonda's resolve intensified when the galleys for Naomi Klein's 2019 Green New Deal manifesto *On Fire* landed on her doorstep, just as she was heading off to Big Sur for Labor Day weekend. She was so shaken by Klein's book that she immediately called Annie Leonard, then head of Greenpeace USA. "This was not a cause," says Fonda. "This was not a specific war in a specific place, or a specific group of people fighting for rights. This was human civilization we're talking about. I just realized it in the core of my body. This is the moment I have to completely show up with everything I have." We're the first generation to experience the climate crisis, she said, and we're the last that can do anything about it. "I want to be part of the generation that does something about it, because this is it."

Feelings of despair are understandable in the face of imminent climate disaster. But they can also be a retreat, a means of leaving the hard work of changemaking to someone else. It's not in Fonda's nature to feel that kind of helplessness: "I've never despaired before. I'm not a despairing person." But not even she knew exactly what she ought to be doing, which is why she called Leonard, who promptly set up a call with Klein, climate activist Bill McKibben, and environmental lawyer Jay Halfon. "I wanted to raise a ruckus," Fonda says. So together, the group came up with the idea of planning an act of civil disobedience every Friday, inspired by protests like Randall Robinson's 1980s antiapartheid sit-ins outside the South African embassy, as well as by the actions of Fridays for Future, the youth movement organized by Greta Thunberg in 2018. Young people, Fonda said, "were asking for us. They were saying, 'We didn't create this crisis, but it's our future that's going to be destroyed. Where are the older people to join us?' So I said, 'I'm here. I volunteer.'"

The first Fire Drill Friday was held on October 11, 2019, with Fonda appearing on the steps of the Capitol in a black-and-white houndstooth newsboy cap and a three-alarm-red coat. Only about 50 people showed up to hear the speakers and experts who'd been scheduled to appear, though that number would swell in the coming weeks. Fonda was arrested that day—photos show her holding her zip-tied wrists high, a badge of honor. And although this wasn't her first arrest (she'd been arrested once in 1970, at the behest of the Nixon White House on suspicion of drug possession, and several times by military police during anti-Vietnam War protests), it was the first time she'd been detained for civil disobedience. She would be arrested a total of five times—spending one night in jail—across the 14 Fire Drill Friday protests held in D.C. through January 10, 2020.

The pandemic forced Fire Drill Fridays to move its protests and educational sessions online, and though the last virtual event was held on January 5, 2024, the movement's momentum continues. One thing Fonda learned from the experience is that Americans do care about climate issues. Data collected by the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication in autumn 2023 show that an estimated 72% of Americans believe climate change is happening, and some 70% believe it will harm plants and animals as well as future generations of humans. The whole point, Fonda said, is to let people know they're needed. As attendance at Fire Drill Fridays grew, it was, Fonda said, mostly older women who showed up, "women who'd never been to a rally before." When people are asked why they haven't taken any action in response to the climate crisis, the answer, Fonda said, is often simply that nobody asked them. "So I say the great unasked is our target. Let's turn that concern into action."

When you spend an hour or two with a person who cares passionately about a particular issue, their idealism tends to fill the air, sometimes to the point of crowding out the human being sitting in front of you. This is even somewhat true of Fonda, not because there's anything recessive about her, but because her mission seems to have set every molecule of her being ablaze. She's the same Jane Fonda we think we all know—and yet more. She speaks of how the climate crisis affects women more negatively than men, particularly in the Global South. She makes a brief reference to her own recent cancer diagnosis—she was treated for non-Hodgkin lymphoma in 2022 and is now in remission—as a springboard to talk about the prevalence of cancer in communities located near refineries, oil wells, and fracking facilities, not to mention the fossil-fuel pollution that surrounds us all. She speaks with urgency about the 2024 election, whose outcome could determine the fate of the planet. In 2022, she and a small board of advisers established the Jane Fonda Climate PAC to help elect "climate champions," particularly down ballot, where, she said, "the robust work on climate is happening. Mayors, city councils, boards of supervisors, county executives … are the people that can create a whole climate plan, make it more resilient in your city or community."

The political action committee is in high gear for the upcoming elections. Candidates are begging for its endorsement, and Fonda says they go through a rigorous vetting process—and they absolutely cannot take money from the fossil-fuel industry. "This is probably the most important election. The problem is we say this all the time, only this time it's really true. Who gets elected in the United States in November [2024] is going to greatly determine whether there's a future."

But even Fonda, whose passion and commitment are so exemplary, is more than just the sum of the issues she cares about. In her book *What Can I Do? My Path from Climate Despair to Action*, she writes of being in that jail cell and wondering what the late Tom Hayden, a brilliant activist and one of her three ex-husbands, would think of her. He was a great strategist. How would he advise her and her compatriots to proceed? In the next paragraph, though, she wonders if she would have had the nerve to move to D.C. and launch a project as ambitious as Fire Drill Fridays if Hayden were still alive. When I ask her

Below: *Fonda is arrested by Capitol Police during her Fire Drill Fridays project in 2019.* ***Below right:*** *Fonda speaks at the 2024 TIME Earth Awards Gala in New York City.*

about this moment of self-questioning, she replies, more mischievously than evasively, "Did I say that? Hmm." Then she elaborated.

"I was in awe of Tom. His intellect, the depth of his understanding of what needed to happen and how to make it happen. I was always kind of in the student role with him. And I don't think he respected me very much, or at least he made me feel that I was stupid. And so I think he would have probably tried to talk me out of it. Or I would have been afraid that he wouldn't have approved." The point of this story isn't to paint self-doubt as weakness, but to show how getting beyond it is often what pushes any of us to leap further and higher than we ever thought we could go. "I guess one of the reasons I'm so involved is, I'm 86 years old. I have a feeling that people can say, 'Look at what she's doing at her age! If she can do it, I can do it.'"

The first step out of despair is simply showing up. We've already had brief moments in 2023 where global average temperatures surpassed the 1.5°C temperature increase that scientists say we must avoid, she says. "But we can go back again—we can reduce it. It's going to require incredibly brave and bold actions. And we can be brave and bold."

COP28
UAE
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Climate Change

MIA MOTTLEY

Warning the World

BY SANYA MANSOOR

BARBADIAN PRIME MINISTER MIA MOTTLEY, who has emerged as a fierce critic of the international community's inaction on the climate crisis, warned that the urgent climate risks facing island nations like hers are also affecting big nations like the U.S.

"While we in the islands are the canaries, you are soon going to be the victims of that. Which country is hit by a hurricane every year, do you know? The United States. Every year, it's just different states," Mottley told then TIME CEO and editor in chief Edward Felsenthal at the 2022 TIME100 Summit in New York City. "Our countries in the Caribbean, we play lotto, or roulette, as to which one will be hit. But I would have thought, given the exposure of the [U.S.] southeastern and eastern seaboard, there would be a greater compelling framework for us to treat these issues."

For years, Mottley has been loud in her criticism of global leaders' failure to slow down climate change enough—and that smaller and poorer nations, especially island countries, are bearing the brunt of the effects. "We've been carrying the cost of climate [change] for a while now. We're carrying the cost of the G7 industrialized nations on our balance sheets, and it's wrong and nobody's making room to ensure we get access to grants," she told Felsenthal. "We can't borrow if we have no fiscal space, and the cost of borrowing is also prohibitive."

In 2022, Mottley wrote for TIME, "Developing countries rightfully demand that their rich neighbors do more, given the wealth they've gained from years of burning fossil fuels unchecked." In 2023, she convened the Summit for a New Global Financing Pact in Paris to force reform of multilateral development banks and reduce lending costs for small island developing states.

Mottley has also been supportive of Barbados' move away from its colonial past. In November 2021, the country officially removed Queen Elizabeth II as its head of state, opting instead to become a Republic and installed its first ever president, Dame Sandra Mason. Mottley also reiterated her goal of seeking reparations from colonizers.

Mottley speaks at COP28, the 2023 United Nations Climate Change Conference, held in Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

GABRIELA HEARST

Redefining Fashion's Footprint

BY CADY LANG

WHEN 2024 TIME EARTH AWARDS HONOREE Gabriela Hearst launched her namesake brand in 2015, one of the pillars of her design was a resolute commitment to sustainability. It was a decision that came in the wake of a clarion call from her past. Following the death of her father in 2011, the fashion designer inherited Santa Isabel, her family's 17,000-acre ranch, where she grew up in Paysandú, Uruguay. Revisiting her remote childhood home reminded Hearst how they made their own blankets and furniture, drawing on precious resources from the ranch to construct pieces that would last—a stark contrast to the waste-filled practices of the fashion industry where she had been working for more than a decade. "I started to see the discrepancy between what I was doing in New York and what I was taking care of in Uruguay," she told TIME in 2024. "That's when I started being very concerned about climate change."

In the nine years since she founded her label, Hearst has helped redefine her industry, making the case that knowing where clothing materials come from and who crafts them is the truest form of luxury. Her designs, which favor sleek silhouettes, expert tailoring, and meticulous craftsmanship, have become wardrobe staples for the thinking woman. She counts Angelina Jolie, Greta Thunberg, and Jill Biden, who wore one of her dresses to the 2020 presidential inauguration, among her fans. In addition to heading up Gabriela Hearst, she also served from 2020 to 2023 as the creative director of the French brand Chloé, which she helped become the first European luxury fashion house to receive a B Corp certification for its high social sustainability and environmental performance standards. But while Hearst's profile has risen, her mission remains the same: to create beautiful clothing with care and entice people to join the climate fight. "They have the desire for beauty, so I have to bring consciousness to the product," she said. "You can't deny the catastrophes that are constantly happening worldwide that are climate-related. It's here and it's happening and we're all going to pay a price."

Every step of Hearst's design process is an opportunity to honor climate commitment. She breathes new life into the remnants of Turkish rugs and cashmere scraps, which are reincarnated as colorful overcoats and sharp blazers. Her handbags have a waiting list—not because of a desire for exclusivity, but because she makes them in limited quantities or to order, which helps curtail waste. In 2019, she produced the first carbon-neutral runway show and announced her brand was plastic-free for both front and back of house. She's also refreshingly unconcerned with having her customers buying more. "I'm very happy with my clients just finding one good sweater," she says. "I grew up with that kind of mentality on the farm; if it's good quality, it will last you for years. So we wanted to have a product that was well designed and timeless, using the nicest materials in the world and making it at the highest level."

But Hearst's vision for a more sustainable future extends beyond fashion. She's a vocal advocate for developing nuclear fusion, and she dedicated her Chloé Spring/Summer '23 collection to the clean-energy solution. She believes her advocacy is as vital to her brand as its more creative aspect. "Your legacy is your value system," she says. "We know that we're going to be one of the brands of the future. I am willing to put in the time and dedication because I can see the long-term view. I know exactly where we're going."

***Top left:** Hearst attends a discussion on sustainable fashion at the residence of the U.S. Ambassador to the U.K. in 2024. **Left:** Speaking at the 2022 International Center of Photography Infinity Awards in New York City.*

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ON THE COVER

Top row: *Taylor Swift, Caitlin Clark.*
2nd row: *Serena Williams, Selena Gomez, Halle Berry.*
3rd row: *Billie Eilish, Megan Rapinoe, Issa Rae.*
Bottom row: *Florence Pugh, Olivia Munn, Jane Fonda.*

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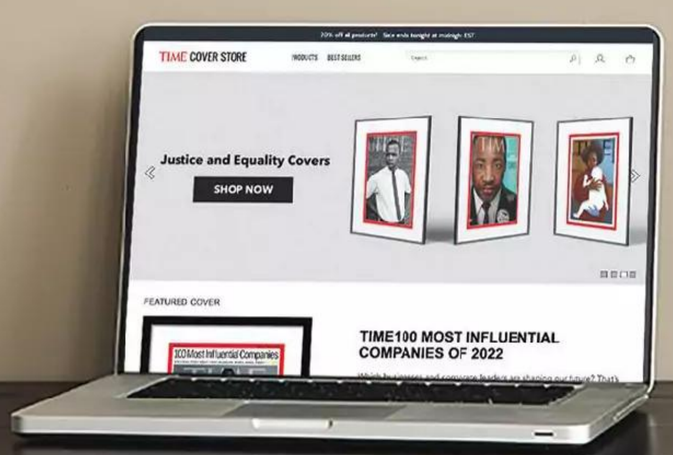
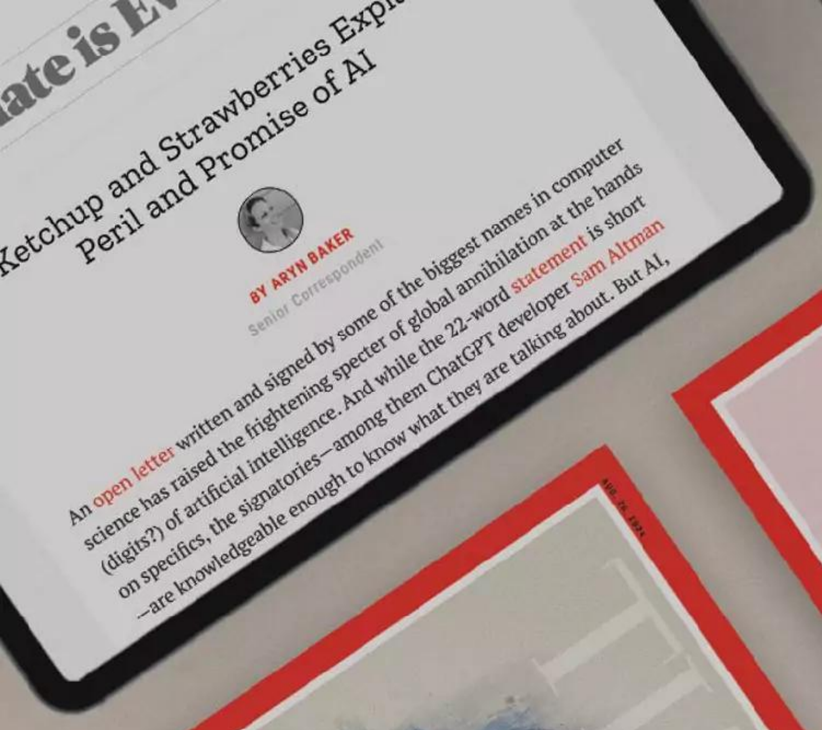
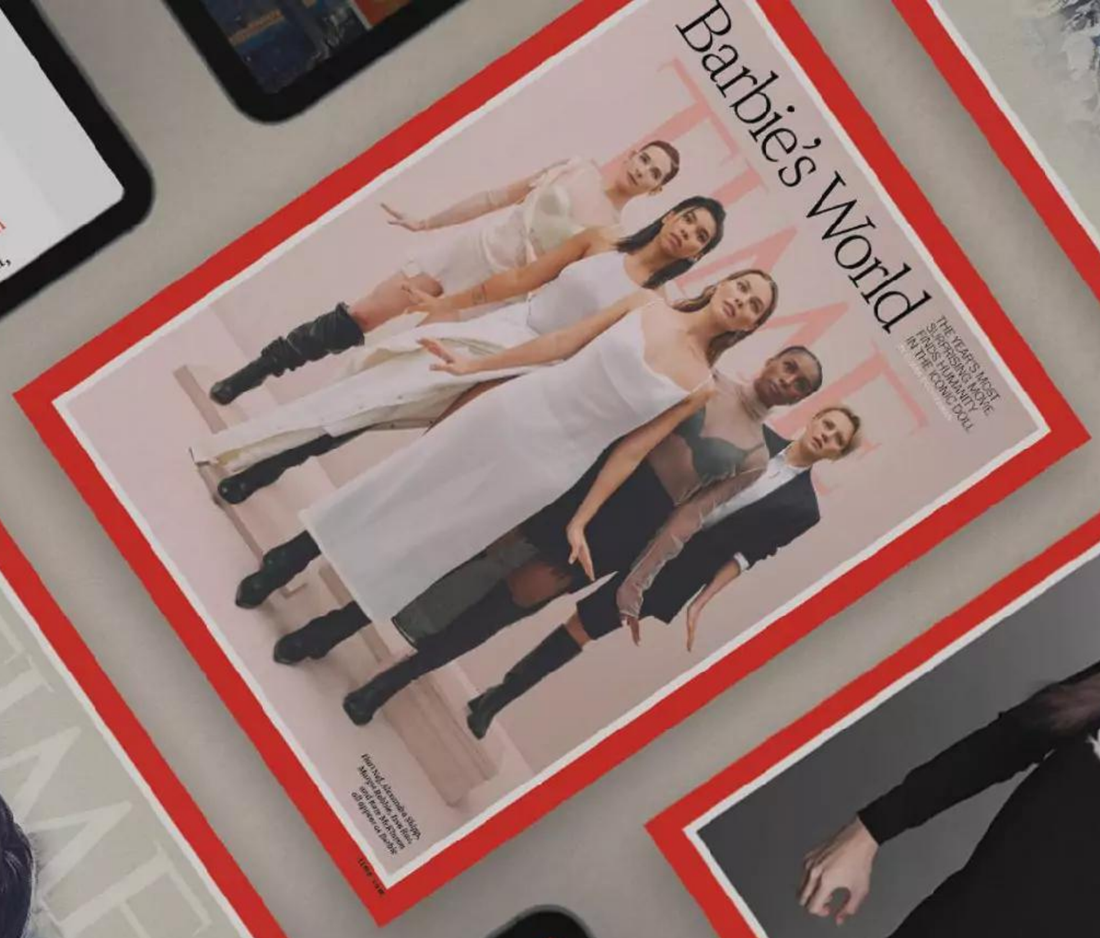



Ketchup and Strawberries Expl
Peril and Promise of AI
BY ARYN BAKER
Senior Correspondent
An open letter written and signed by some of the biggest names in computer science has raised the frightening specter of global annihilation at the hands (digits?) of artificial intelligence. And while the 22-word statement is short on specifics, the signatories—among them ChatGPT developer Sam Altman —are knowledgeable enough to know what they are talking about. But AI,



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